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WALT WHITMAN

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WALT WHITMAN

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY WITH REMINISCENCES

BY

HARRISON S. MORRIS



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TO THE MEMORY OF
HORACE TRAUBEL

PREFACE

A FRIENDSHIP with Walt Whitman in those days when he lived in the little frame house on Mickle Street, in Camden, New Jersey, is the essence of this small book.

It gives the understanding of one of the circle of that day who were attached to Walt for what he said in his books, as well as for his own endearing character.

The outline of Walt's poetic and philosophic aims is necessary to a valuation of his life; and the reminiscences afford vistas into that life as it was lived in daily routine and with growing groups of friends.

It will be perceived that Walt's beliefs, which were so new to the last generations, are no longer a source of surprise. For he divined the coming freedom of men and women from concealment of truth; and he, who was years ahead of his time, is now contemporary with the frankness of women's dress; the greater sincerity in diplomacy; the changing currents in the Churches; and the fairer division of the fruits of labor. He stood for every man's right to be an independent man, and this desire of his is now finding its way even into the lingering feudal theories of Europe.

Walt's view of man's and woman's life will not be old in centuries. It has the vitality attributed to Shakespeare, who is to be credited with all the new depths of thought and meaning which later minds can find in his text. When you build your principles on a base of Nature's law, they are one with Nature, and go on and on to deeper revelations of the rightness of the Universe.

Parts of this book have appeared in Italian, in a Roman series on "Illustrious Americans," issued in connection with the Keats-Shelley Memorial in Rome.

WALT WHITMAN

high in crown and wide of brim, that united the fashions of the Quaker and the Cowboy.

Thus in 1888 looked Walt Whitman, slowly pacing about town or crossing the ferries between Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia — his habitual pleasure. But at home, in the little two-storied house in Mickle Street, Camden, his height loomed with druidic grandeur as he rose from his rocking-chair in the evening, his long grey blanket robe, bordered with blue, falling from his great shoulders to his slippered feet. Standing in the doorway against the gas-lit entry he looked like a Prophet of the Bible. By his monumental presence he transfigured the tiny, ill-furnished room into the abode of genius.

Or, if you happened in to see him in the day-time, he would be seated at the window in his rude but comfortable rocking-chair that might have fitted a Viking. Perhaps his hat would be tipped back — a Quaker habit; he would have a book in his hand, or letters just received, and his face would be lifted to welcome you with a smile and a slowly spoken kind word; or if at a later date, it chanced that you were asked up to his bedroom, there he would sit in a wizard's circle of old property that his whim clung to, hugging the fire and helpless in the excess of his malady.

Such is an external picture of Walt Whitman, in his old age when his inspired work was nearly

done; when his friends had grown in number, but also his enemies and detractors; when his motives were still impugned and his lofty message misunderstood.

II

WHAT was he as a spiritual force in the formation of disciples at home and in Europe, and what was his great message; what did he bring to us that refreshes and invigorates, explains, uplifts, and emancipates?

His whole life is woven into the fabric of his message and of his poems. From the beginning he lived and acted the theme which was to form his book, or more strictly, his book became the essence of his life. Thus every salient fact is valuable, every simple or picturesque occurrence explains some thread woven into "Leaves of Grass."

Walter Whitman was born at West Hills, Long Island, in the State of New York, on May 31, 1819.

Long Island is a fish-shaped island about one hundred and thirty miles east and west and ten miles north and south. It lies between Long Island Sound to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Its western end touches the city of New York at Brooklyn, once a separate town, now incorporated in the greater city, which Walt lovingly calls Mannahatta, the name given by the Indians to the rocky point on which the original city rests. He liked racy and authentic names for places and for people, as is shown by his chosen nickname

Walt, which was abbreviated from his father's name Walter; and by Paumanok, the Indian name for Long Island.

His birthplace is a fertile island of farms and fisheries, but few factories; a rather lazy climate of sea-blown winds and open sun, with low trees and abundant flowers, short streams of cedar-tinged water and small towns in the many bays and sedgy inlets of the coast. The waves of the sea beat upon its tilted sandy shore and the lesser ripples of the Sound gently wash its northern coast. Thus it is that the yachtsmen have chosen the waters of the Sound and have built rich mansions on the cliffs, while the hardy and fearless fishermen sail into the ocean from many little ports on the opposite coast. It was with these that Walt as a boy and younger man resorted; and from them and his mother's ancestors, the seafaring Van Velsors and Williamses, he learned self-reliance and independence of action and of judgment. Here, too, on the far-stretching gray beaches he imbibed the sounds and pictures of the sea and shore which are kept forever fresh in the pages of his book.

West Hills lies near the centre of the island. It was, as he has said, close to the dividing line both of the land and of the races who settled there — the Dutch to the West and the English to the East, the stock of both being joined in Walt. West Hills was never more than a cluster of farms at much

distance from each other, though it is not far from the town of Huntington, on Long Island Sound, which had reached out its influence into Walt's youthful years. The hills are low and unnoticeable, covered now with a second growth of trees, but from the highest points there is a view of the sea, and in days and nights of storm the beat of the breakers was blown to the farmhouse and must have woven itself into the texture of the boy's mind. The house is of heavy timbers covered with shingles, now painted brown, but once no doubt of the clean fleecy gray to which the sea-winds bleach them in this latitude. It has two stories and an attic, with little outbuildings and a well in the corner of the fence by the high-road.

The interior of this farmhouse inhabited by the family at the beginning of the nineteenth century is described by John Burroughs, the essayist and naturalist, as containing a great smoke-canopied kitchen, with vast hearth and chimney at one end, where the twelve or fifteen negro slaves owned by the family as house and field servants gave the place a patriarchal look. The very young darkies would squat in this kitchen toward sundown, eating their supper of Indian pudding and milk. The furniture as well as the food was rude but substantial. Pork, poultry, and beef and vegetables were plentiful, and cider was the men's common drink. The women could have coffee, tea, and

sugar. Clothes were home-spun. Books were scarce. It was in just such an interior that Abraham Lincoln got the elements of his education, as he lay before the roaring wood fires which gave both light and warmth in the winter nights.

Such houses, such farms, austere without luxury, the abode of a thrifty and hard life, have been the birthplaces of many of our American leaders. The discipline thus gained has hewn out hardy bodies and developed clear and vigorous minds. The solitary days in the fields at work, the limited play-time, often solitary as well, the rigid church-going at the Meeting House as a source of relief from the day-long drudgery, the homely school with long walks to and from it in all kinds of bitter weather — these experiences have been the common lot of our most enlightened men, and they have given us a race full of activity, inventiveness, and ability to take care of itself.

The Whitman family had owned the farm of 500 acres on which the farmhouse stands, since the middle of the seventeenth century. They had migrated from England to New England and thence to Huntington, Long Island, and as Walt tells us, "the West Hills Whitmans, and all others in Suffolk County, New York State, have since radiated" from Rev. Zechariah Whitman and his son Joseph, who came over from England in the ship *True Love* in 1640.

The Whitman stock was a vigorous and long-lived one, both from its English ancestry and from the discipline of the robust New World. Walt's great-grandmother on his father's side was "a large, swarthy woman who smoked tobacco, rode on horseback like a man, managed the most vicious horse, and, becoming a widow, ran her own farmlands and slaves, "with language in which others were not spared." The grandmother on the Van Velsor side was named before marriage Amy Williams. She was a Friend or Quakeress, Mr. Burroughs says, "of a sweet, sensible character, of housewifely proclivities and deeply intuitive and spiritual." Walt's paternal grandmother "was equally noble, perhaps stronger in character, lived to be very old, had quite a family of sons, was a natural lady and was in early life a schoolmistress." Walt dwells on "my grandmother Amy's sweet, old face in its Quaker cap"; and of his grandfather, Major Cornelius Van Velsor, he says — "the old race of the Netherlands, so deeply grafted on Manhattan Island, never yielded a more marked and full Americanized specimen; the Major was jovial, red, stout, with sonorous voice and characteristic physiognomy."

Walt's father, Walter Whitman, was a faithful product in body and mind of this dutiful life. He was huge in stature, silent, kindly and obstinate, with an eye to business and skilled in carpentry

and building. He farmed on the old place at first, but later he went through the country putting up solid frame houses and selling them with profit. He married Louisa Van Velsor in 1816. She is described by her son in a loving passage that well exhibits his lifelong devotion.

I went down from this ancient grave-place [the burial ground of the Whitmans which he had revisited] eighty or ninety rods, to the site of the Van Velsor homestead, where my mother was born [1795] and where every spot had been familiar to me as a child and youth. Then stood there a long, rambling, dark-gray shingle-sided house, with sheds, pens, a great barn and much road-space. There with all those wooded, hilly, healthy surroundings my dearest Mother, Louisa Van Velsor, grew up. Her mother Amy Williams, of the Friends or Quaker denomination — the Williams family, seven sisters and one brother — the father and brother sailors, both of whom met their deaths at sea.

III

THE descendant of these sturdy ancestors, and the second of eight children born to these parents, was Walt Whitman. No doubt he owed much to the hereditary hardihood, good sense, virtue and shrewdness of his race; but as he stands forth amongst his kin a conspicuous exception in habit, intellect and genius, his personality must have been formed by Nature for such education and spiritual guidance as have given him the rank of a leader in thought, and an inspired bard and seer.

As his life developed, the events which made it up, partly of chance, but more often of his own choosing, were the fabric of his message. He saw from the earliest dawn of his reason that one life embodied all life and if he could express his own unchecked impulses and sensations in language which would hold attention, he could explain some of the mystery of existence, and lead men thus understanding it to better things. The solid was only the outward manifestation of the Spirit, the Spirit was wise and pure. If his hearers would heed and follow the Spirit, no matter how clothed and hidden, they also would be wise and pure.

This was his argument, and as the phases of his life unfold, this fundamental idea must be kept in

mind in both illustration and explanation of his career.

A boy with the soul of a poet will find out those things in Nature which best feed his appetite for beauty and truth. Even if he is imprisoned in city streets his feet will turn, when free, toward the open landscape, as did those of Keats and Coleridge and Leigh Hunt. But when the heart that assimilates the meaning and loveliness of the country and of the sea is born amongst them, and uses them as playmates in childhood, as Walt Whitman did — like Wordsworth in his beloved mountains and lakes, and Tennyson in his Surrey downs, — then the association grows with life and is never separable from the character of the poet. Even when a little boy, Walt, with his sister Hannah, whom he especially loved, must have toddled out toward the ocean and smelt its odors and heard its noises — “the mystic surf beat of the sea”; but as he passed through boyhood, he tells us how he travelled afoot, or on horseback, and sometimes by boat, to all parts of Paumanok, especially the East, even to Orient Point, the sandy terminus of Long Island. He visited the light houses; and he heard the stories of wrecks. “As a youngster,” he says, “I was in the atmosphere and traditions of many of these wrecks;” and he would go forth in winter with a chum or two, over the frozen waters of the shallow bays that often stretch between the

outer sand bars, where the breakers beat, and the meadows of salt-bleached grass. They would take axes and eel spears and fill their baskets "with great fat, sweet, white-meated" eels. He truly says, "The shores of the bay, winter and summer, and my doings there in early life are woven all through 'Leaves of Grass.'"

His fraternizing with strong men of labor and good sense began in these early years. He liked to go down to Montauk, the southern extremity of the Island to the East, with "the blue-fishers and the annual squads of sea-bass takers," and he would like to meet "the strange, unkempt, half-barbarous herdsmen" along Montauk peninsula, who lived there aloof from civilization. Sometimes, too, he would see the few remaining Indians or half-breeds of an almost extinct tribe. He "always had a plentiful acquaintance with the baymen, farmers, pilots," and thus he pictures the joys of his boyhood — "clam-digging, barefoot, with trousers rolled up" as he "sniffed the saline smell and heard the soothing rustle of the waves." Literally, he took into his being the beauty and meaning of Nature, not like a conscious worshipper or Pantheist, but as a lover that could do no otherwise, and who was destined to be her interpreter.

The Whitmans were not church-going people. There had been Baptists in the family; but the

Van Velsors were, at least partly, Quaker, and the Walter Whitman household inclined to that sect.

The Quakers or Friends, though English in origin, had been early settlers in America. Their founder George Fox visited the United States and had even spoken at meetings in Long Island. William Penn, the Proprietor of Pennsylvania, was a Quaker, and he drew around him in that State a large community of these simple and devout worshippers. They still form a centre of ethical influence in the East, though they have fallen off in numbers. Their worship is without ceremony. They gather into a plain meeting-house, where the leaders face the audience in austere silence, until "the Spirit moves" someone to speak. The speaking is of a pious or mystical character that often creates deep, but silent, emotion in the hearers. I remember trying to explain the Quakers to an Italian gentleman in Rome, who with a bright effort to understand me, amusingly said: "Oh, I know; some kind of Mormons." The Quakers are as far from being Mormons as the Catholics from being Mohammedans. The Mormons were polygamous, and followed the doctrines of an obscure adventurer named Joseph Smith, who pretended to have found his spurious gospel under a stone. The Quakers follow only their conscience, the "Inner Light" of Divine Inspiration which lives in the soul; they live exemplary lives and are inde-

pendent in their convictions and elevated in their pursuits. The name "Quaker" was given them in derision. They appropriately call themselves the "Religious Society of Friends," and though they have not always lived up to the title, their aim is to be friendly, helpful, and just.

The Whitman family were never constant in attendance at the Quaker Meetings of their neighborhood, but Walt's grandfather, a man of perhaps more education and intellect than his son, had been the early associate of the celebrated Elias Hicks, who became a leader of the sect in Long Island. Thus the family were inclined to follow this eloquent and reverent old man, and after removal from West Hills to Brooklyn in 1823, when Walt was four years old, they seem to have heard him preach, perhaps often.

One occasion, of a later date, when Walt was ten years old, stands out conspicuously in the mental development of the Poet. He was taken by his parents to hear the venerable Friend preach in the ball room of Morrison's Hotel in Brooklyn. He was a tall, stiff old man with a high brow and a face that wore the look of a long struggle with the problems of life and death. He is said to have had the build and physique of an American Indian, and, indeed, in his youth he had been a great hunter of the abundant game near Huntington, his birthplace. He had suffered afflictions, but his na-

ture was temperamentally bent toward the gloom and bitterness of our transitory life and its issue into grace and salvation through reliance on the Inner Light. This he preached to the text: "What is the chief end of man?" and his inspired eloquence fell on rich and well-prepared soil in the mind of small Whitman. Thronging with the scenes and sensations of his outdoor life, and stimulated with the beauty of earth and sky, that adolescent faculty took in its most memorable impression to that date. I dwell on this episode because it denotes one leading tendency that lives in the "Leaves of Grass." This is the subjective strain which makes Walt a bard or seer, as well as a poet. Perhaps the word mystic would better describe his intuitive reliance on the inner guidance. This runs through the book like a deeper harmony, a basic principle. And yet his sound sense and a certain cautiousness which he might have called "cuteness" that goes with the sturdy faith of the Quakers held him away from the fanaticism of mystics like Molinos or Peter the Hermit. The influences of a home where Friendly principles were imbibed would have given the child a bias toward independence of conviction; indeed, this is the American idea, it is in the air. But it should be held in mind that Walt became a radical beyond all the confines of his sect, and this is in some degree attributable to the example and the teaching of Elias Hicks, who,

just before the delivery of the memorable sermon recorded by the boy of ten, had suffered exclusion, and was disowned by the official body of the Friends. It will seem tragically inconsistent that a body thus styling themselves should commit so unfriendly an act against one of their leading exponents. But the cleavage had grown deep between the two extremes of theological bias, the trinitarian and the unitarian, and as Hicks adopted the latter, and also held that the Hebrew Scripture, as he called the Bible, was an inspired book, but that the Inner Light, "the noiseless secret ecstasy, the inward, Deity-planted law of the emotional soul," was paramount, the sentiment of friendliness had to fall before the *odium theologicum*. He went out from the councils of the orthodox Friends, and with him went a throng who formed a branch of the sect now called "Hicksites." His self-reliance and reliance on his sense of spiritual guidance from within are reflected in the career and the works of Walt Whitman, who wrote a brief biography of him, and who kept a portrait of him always over his mantel in the Camden house. In Whitman's words, "He is the most democratic of the religionist-prophets." But the boy was by temperament free; he was untroubled about the destiny of his soul or the formulas of religion. He saw beyond dogma and the cramped limits of a social code. He never fell into the nar-

row theology of his leader, but threw away, as he grew up, all theology and rested his faith on the beauty and truth of the Universe, and his conduct on the Inner Light. Thus he was led by either hand through the great struggle with error he was to carry on to the end.

IV

THE Whitman family lived in Brooklyn in 1824 when the Marquis of Lafayette visited America for the second time, and it helps to link the child with the beginnings of "These States," as he afterwards proudly named them, to recall the caress which the chivalric French General gave little Walt, in helping to lift the children to safety from the crowded streets of Brooklyn. He singled out the five-year Walt by giving him a kiss — an evidence, no doubt, of the magnetic appeal which Walt always made to the end of his long life.

Then came the Public School for such formal education as a child needs, but of this the small Walt profited but little. His education was coming to him from the open sky and the tumbling sea. He acquired somehow knowledge of the stars and of the plants and living things on land and shore. Arithmetic, grammar were not for him, saving in their most necessary elements. He appears always to have written and spoken correctly by instinct, and no doubt the backbone of his education of this sort came from the reading in poetry and fiction which now began. He was in 1829 or 30 placed in a lawyer's office in Brooklyn as office boy; he says characteristically, "I had a

nice desk and window-nook to myself." Here he read the books which his employer, Edward C. Clarke, who "kindly helped at his handwriting and composition," procured for him by subscription to "a big circulating library." He tells us he "revelled in romance-reading of all kinds, first the Arabian Nights, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in many other directions, took in Walter Scott's novels one after another, and his poetry."

When he was twelve or thirteen Walt went to learn his trade in a printing and newspaper office in Brooklyn. He worked successively on the *Long Island Patriot* and the *Long Island Star*, and no doubt helped to support the home, where there were now eight children, — six younger than himself, — two girls and the rest boys.

At about sixteen years he was big and strong, as he always was till after the Civil War, and at that time the family moved back to the country, perhaps on account of the ill-health of his mother, or because his father's building operations were not succeeding. But through all the years of his younger life he was "down Long Island more or less every summer" taking in that education in Nature and its deeper meanings and its poetry, which he alone of the family was fitted to imbibe.

His book-education was going on through omniverous novel-reading; he devoured at this period everything he could get hold of; he went to the

theatre whenever he was able, and his mind, thus storing a knowledge of men and of art and stimulated to imaginative beauty, began to be active in its own way—he took to speaking at the debating societies that were then so widely formed in self-educating America, in Brooklyn, and one or two country towns.

You can watch the growth of this great mind by the employment given it, and by its choice of subsistence. If he ever did “loaf and invite his soul,” it was not in the sense of slothfulness. He was always busy with the things that mentally counted. Every episode of his career became a leaf in the book his genius has left us.

He worked at typesetting in New York about 1836–37, and then naturally gravitated to school-teaching in the country, for which he was pretty well furnished, by this time, with an untechnical, though rich, abundance of facts. In those days the teacher “boarded-round.” He lived alternately with the families of his pupils; and Walt considered this “one of his deepest lessons in human nature behind the scenes, and in the masses.” Here his love for the plain American people had its initiative.

Then he ventured to publish a newspaper in Huntington on his own account, but as he had to deliver it himself and subscribers were hard to secure, he gave this up and returned to printing in

New York; and now he, significantly, began to write in prose and verse.

In 1836-37 New York City was a mere germ of the colossal and magnificent metropolis with its wonderful sky-scrapers of fifty stories against a sky like Italy's, which is now New York. It was then old-fashioned, comfortable, leisurely; but its great harbor was full of commerce, and its natural advantages, at the confluence of the Hudson River from the North and Long Island Sound from the East, were making it rich. To Walt, with his eager mind and his love of men and women, it must, even in 1836, have been a city of wonders.

Just as he welcomed the experience of school-teaching for its touch with all sorts of humanity, so Walt resorted wherever he found real men and women at their daily business or pleasure. New York and its surroundings afforded him this diversion, this source of growth in fellowship and in knowledge of life as no other place on the American continent could have done. Here were the ferries that brought the traveller and the laborer to and fro across the North and East Rivers to Manhattan Island, and here were the omnibuses on Broadway, the great diagonal street that runs up the centre of the Island, and on the other teeming thoroughfares of the city. To both of these methods of transport Walt was devoted. He had a special affinity for the ferries from Brooklyn to New

York from boyhood; "to me," he said, "they afford streaming, never failing, living poems" — they were not only a spectacle, they were his form of education. He adored the water, salt at that point, and often rough, and the busy boats in the Bay, and he liked the coarse, shrewd men he met on them; but in the night he could study the stars from the open decks and he learned much about the constellations and the planets, and incidentally about the mystery and unity of the universe, which was to appear in the fabric of his "Leaves of Grass."

It was the same with the tide of human life on Broadway. The centre of the moving panorama was the omnibuses, and to these he turned for enjoyment of his passion for comradeship. He rode back and forth on them until he became known to all the bluff and hearty drivers and found a welcome place beside them on the box. He calls the 'buses by their familiar names of "Red-bird" and "Yellow-bird" and he relished his memories of the drivers — "a strange, natural, quick-eyed and wondrous race — not only Rabelais and Cervantes would have gloated over them, but Homer and Shakespeare." He shows thus the bias of his creative faculty, he recognizes the reality of characters like Falstaff, Don Quixote, and Pantagruel, and he finds their prototypes in the everlasting stream of human descent. The drivers told him

the most vivid yarns ever spun, with rarest mimicry, riding the whole length of Broadway as he listened, and in turn himself declaimed some stormy passage of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" or "Richard III." "Not only for comradeship" he liked them — "great studies I found them also." You see, he was not enough of an emotionalist to quite lose his objective sense of the humorous or artistic in character, and this is the mingled element that made him the artist which, at his best, he was. "The influence," he writes long afterward, "of those Broadway omnibus jaunts and drivers and declamations and escapades, undoubtedly entered into the gestation of 'Leaves of Grass.'"

Walt was now about twenty-five years old and he had tasted the full life of a writer, a journalist, and a Bohemian in New York, the smartest and most thriving city in the United States. It was, about 1844, not only the commercial centre of the country, but in some respects a literary centre, and its influence and wealth gave it great weight as a political stronghold. Walt saw or met many of the leaders of the parties into which the voters had now divided: the Democrats and the Whigs. He was himself, as his father had been, a Democrat, but he was never a violent partisan, though he was always a radical; he feared no change that stood for man's rights and natural development. Thus

he records that he saw Andrew Jackson, afterwards President of the United States, and Webster, the greatest of our orators, Henry Clay, and Seward, later in President Lincoln's Cabinet, and Van Buren, the tragic President who weakly compromised on the Civil War. He also helped to greet Kossuth, the Polish patriot whom America adored; and he knew most of the literary circle in New York: Fitz-Greene Halleck, Bryant, Poe, the prevailing poets of that day, and James Fenimore Cooper, the novelist. It was the period of many noted visitors to the young Republic, and he spoke of seeing Charles Dickens and the first Japanese who came to America.

This will help to realize for the reader, the times and the circumstances in which Walt Whitman grew into manhood, and it will interpret much that should be known for the full assimilation of "Leaves of Grass." But there were many other experiences in that city of gathering nationalities and influxes from the seven seas. The theatres and the opera fascinated him and gave growth to his creative instinct. He heard Alboni and Grisi, the tenor Mario, and Badiali the baritone, every time they sang; and he thought them "the finest in the world." The delight they gave him breathes in his reminiscent words:

I hear the chorus — it is a grand opera;
Ah, this indeed is music! This suits me.

A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me;
The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling
me full.

He saw the elder Booth play "Richard III" or "Lear" and did not know "which was best," and he saw every great actor of those years when New York was beginning to enjoy its wealth and import the best talent of Europe to enlighten it. Jenny Lind was a memorable treat to him.

In 1848-49 Walt Whitman was editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, a democratic newspaper of a single sheet. In this he displayed his views of politics and social ethics, denouncing the smug attitude of the churches, and advocating mercy for animals,—he was never, like his relations, a hunter,—and taking the attitude of temperate conduct toward Mexico, with which the United States was presently at war. He would, of course, adopt an anti-slavery faith, even at this early day in the dispute between the Slave States of the South, whose cotton crop was dependent on slave labor, and the Northern States, who were for freedom. There were at this time added complications regarding the admission of new states in the West into the Union with slavery or wholly free. He was a "Free-soiler," and this led to a break with his orthodox Democratic employers and the loss of his editorship.

V

A NEW division of Walt's life began from the date in 1849 when he gave up his editorial work and left New York. He and his brother, whom he calls Jeff, as he dubs himself Walt, set out for New Orleans at the mouth of the great Mississippi River, where he had engaged to write for *The Crescent*, a new daily paper. He had never been farther away from home than the end of Long Island and he was a home-staying soul. But the chance to travel through the South and see for himself the mighty land and people he was preparing to celebrate in his book was a powerful magnet which overcame his love for home and Manhattan. The journey was a heavy undertaking in those days of rough conveyance. He passed down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, and through many of "These States" he so well loved. The brothers were absent about two years and returned by way of the Mississippi and the Great Lakes to the North; seeing the Falls of Niagara, which is the tourists' unfailing resort, parts of Canada and New York's mountains and forests, with a final passage down the Hudson River. Such a survey of the country was what he needed for the full fruition of his literary design. He had divined

the extent and power of the land, but he must see it to interpret it, and you will find this trip of his enwoven into the web of his book in many-colored threads. The absence is noteworthy for another, but very obscure, reason. It seems likely that in New Orleans he fell into some love affair and left there a child or children whose identity has not been proven, though I remember hearing of the visit of a grandson to the Camden house. It has been said that this episode gave rise to his failure to marry later in life, but no such conclusion can be drawn from any utterance of his own. He was always most reserved on the subject of his life in New Orleans, and on the conjectures arising from it; but in a letter of his to John Addington Symonds, the English essayist with whom he liked to correspond, he is quoted as saying:

My life, young manhood, mid-age, times South, etc., have been jolly bodily, and doubtless open to criticism. Tho' unmarried I have had six children — two are dead — one living, Southern grandchild, fine boy, writes to me occasionally — circumstances (connected with their fortune and benefit) have separated me from intimate relations.

It is not certain that the words "times South" apply wholly to New Orleans; he would speak of Washington, D. C., as the South, and there he subsequently lived for some years.

Coming back to Brooklyn in 1851, though other records than his own make the date earlier, he

opened a small book-store and printing office, where he published a newspaper called *The Freeman*, a title which showed his abhorrence of African slavery. But his habit was not that of steady application. He wandered from work to idleness as men of genius are apt to do, seeking the unrevealed and the key to the mystery of existence. You could as soon enclose him in the confines of a store or editorial sanctum as you could the free wind.

This time he passed from editing to building. His father had done well in erecting frame houses; Brooklyn was fast growing. Walt took to carpentering with his father. He lived at home and spent little. You can feel in

The carpenter dresses his plank — the tongue of his
foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp

the deep imprint of this experience in the fast-coming book.

Two entries of the most profound significance stand in his notes of 1855:

Lost my father this year by death. Commenced putting Leaves of Grass to press for good, at the job-printing office of my friends, the brothers Rome, in Brooklyn, after many Mss. doing and undos.

Other great authors have a shelf-full of volumes to record. No one book suffices to illustrate their lives. But Walt Whitman's life *is* one book, and henceforth we follow his career through the history

of his book. He sums up his life, with its moving impulses and woven design, to this period in a typical passage:

I estimate three leading sources and formative stamps to my own character — the Maternal nativity-stock brought from far-away Netherlands, for one (doubtless the best); — the subterranean tenacity and central bony structure (obstinacy, wilfulness) which I get from my paternal English elements, for another; — and the combination of my Long Island birth-spot, sea-shores, childhood's scenes, absorptions with teeming Brooklyn and New York — with, I suppose, my experience afterward in the Secession outbreak, for the third.

VI

WALT WHITMAN seems to have had no hesitation in choosing as the title for his book "Leaves of Grass." It must have grown naturally out of his views of life and nature, for he speaks of the approaching book by this name long before it is entirely put together. It was his habit to use words in a double sense, or with a sort of allegorical purpose. When he begins the poem "Walt Whitman" with

I celebrate myself

he does not mean that he is making a biography, but that "himself" is the epitome of the universe and he is going to interpret the world of sense and spirit through himself. In this way he uses the words of his title. "Leaves of Grass," in its allusions, covers the leaves of the book, which are as grass, as well as the more profound purpose which the "leaves" carry, as illustrated with a matchless poetic passage in the poem:

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me
with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what
it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of
hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer, designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners,
that we may see and remark, and say, "Whose?"

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced
babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic;
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and
narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white;
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them
the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of
graves.

Tenderly will I use you, curling grass;
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young
men;
It may be if I had known them I would have loved
them;
It may be you are from old people, and from women,
and from offspring taken soon out of their mothers'
laps;
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of
old mothers;
Darker than the colorless beards of old men;
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of
mouths.

The title was puzzling to me until I one day rode
out with Walt, through a bramble of blackberry

bushes and wayside weeds. As we drove through this he said in his slow, sweet voice: "Oh, the leaves of grass, the leaves of grass" — which made it plain that he not only meant the title to stand for the printed leaves and the homely grass which is man and woman, but also the "green world" of summer, the lawn, the harvest, the forest, and equally the thicket. He no doubt got this figurative way of looking at this subject from the habit of the Quakers who, saturated with the Bible, speak often with allegorical meaning, and emphasize their convictions with picturesque phrase of double import. Elias Hicks explains thus the "Cross of Christ," "It is the perfect law of God, written on the tablet of the heart." Thus, to repeat, when the "I" and "me" in the "Leaves of Grass" do not unmistakably mean the Author, they stand for Walt Whitman, "a simple separate Person," but the type and soul of the universe, as uttered in his word "En-Masse."

With firm and regular step they wend — they never
stop,
Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred mil-
lions;
One generation playing its part, and passing on;
Another generation playing its part, and passing on
in its turn,
With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards
me, to listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me.

Here the last word, "me," clearly means the soul, the truth of the spirit of life, the fluent principle, always right, that impels the world.

The Soul:

Forever and forever — longer than soil is brown and solid — longer than water ebbs and flows.

By chance this is betrayed in one of the many changes made in the text of "Leaves of Grass" during its evolution. One passage now runs:

As the hugging and loving Bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day, with stealthy tread.

But originally this began:

As God comes a loving bed-fellow, etc.

Thus it is plain that the "loving Bed-fellow" — note the capital letter — is really the Holy Spirit, the soul; and the philosophy of the book is made clearer, fine as it would be if read objectively.

The book now opens with Inscriptions, produced and published later than the original edition of 1855. That volume began with a preface on the new poetry followed by the poem now called "Walt Whitman," then "A Song of Myself," in which a number of verbal changes have been made but no essential change of principle. It was over a proposed change of principle uttered in this and in "Calamus" and "Children of Adam"

that Walt and Emerson, our great transcendental thinker and poet, had their famous debate.

The "Inscriptions" thus are afterthoughts that open the book with an explanation of its aims — but was ever a book or theme more grandly proclaimed? "Behold, I, Walt Whitman," he seems to trumpet through a brazen horn of sonorous cadences, "summon you to hear the law of life and death. I am the body and the soul. So are you, and through me ye shall know it." There is a sweep of grandeur and divine self-confidence, a freshness like the blowing of some wind from a purer atmosphere, in these opening blasts that is arresting, authentic, convincing. You stop to listen, and your spirit feels a new elasticity, your mind is loosened from its jog-trot system and given wings of confidence. You face creation with a new heart and almost a new body. You are refreshed, uplifted, emancipated.

This is the prelude; but as you pass on to what is now the first poem or chant, "Starting from Paumanok," his favorite name for Long Island, you find that this whiff of new life is not accidental. The theme begins now to unfold with new inspiration and deeper significance. You gradually see the drift of the Druid-like mind and catch the angle of the philosophy. Really, philosophy is too smug a word to apply to Walt's bardic hymn of life's meaning. It is not a system he forms; it is a

profound and reverent penetration into the functions of the soul and its everlasting righteousness. Merely to see the soul, if it could be seen, would not suffice for him. He recognizes its inevitable justice, truth, and obedience to law, and he feels that the true joy of life is for him and us to follow its stream of untrammelled illumination.

I suspect that the long poem "Starting from Paumanok" is placed at the beginning, before what was once the body of "Leaves of Grass," because, before his "Salut au Monde," Walt wants to tell us who he is. This is, of course, conjectural, but he had a methodical mind; a sort of Quaker logic possessed him, which would impel him to such an order in the prelude to his book. He begins in a biographical vein, and all through the poem you will see bits of self-history, mingled to be sure with the mystic references to his other "Me"; the soul, of which he is at once a type and an atom. He also tells in this proclamation what he means to do, as Milton did in opening "Paradise Lost," or Shakespeare in his Prologues:

Know you! solely to drop in the earth the germs of
a greater Religion,
The following chants, each for its kind, I sing.
Ma femme!
For the brood beyond us and of us,
For those who belong here, and those to come,
I, exultant, to be ready for them, will now shake out
carols stronger and haughtier than have ever yet
been heard upon earth.

I will effuse egotism, and show it underlying all —
and I will be the bard of personality;
And I will show of male and female that either is
but the equal of the other;
And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in
me — for I am determin'd to tell you with cour-
ageous clear voice, to prove you illustrious;

And I will show that whatever happens to anybody,
it may be turn'd to beautiful results — and I will
show that nothing can happen more beautiful
than death;
And I will thread a thread through my poems that
time and events are compact,
And that all the things of the universe are perfect
miracles, each as profound as any.

This, in brief, is his scheme; he deals with the for-
bidden, and makes it sacred; death is as sweet as
life; religion is no vain creed; it is the revelation of
divine law in the universe; miracles are not the ex-
clusive property of ecclesiastics, miracles lie about
us in the simplest growth of Nature:

A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of
infidels.

There are many phases and side-issues in his
scheme, but in the main he tells you that he will
sing Himself as the type of the soul and from his
sensations and conceptions he will “shake out
carols” to celebrate and explain the themes of
birth, life, death, sex and nature. He has seen the
naked forms of things, unshrouded of sophistries

and undraped of dress, and he will show the truth that man has concealed. The hidden is as divine as the exposed, the body as the soul, for all are of the fabric of the righteous universe.

Having sung his prelude and introduced himself in a great gust of harmony, he will now chant the principles and inspirations which he has announced, and thus he opens the poem now called "Walt Whitman," formerly "A Song of Myself," with the abrupt fiat:

I celebrate myself;
And what I assume you shall assume;
For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to
you.
I loafe and invite my Soul;
I lean and loafe at my ease, observing a spear of
summer grass.

He is everything and everything is a part of him. The currents of life flow from him and into him, and thus he is as good an index of the soul, the universe, as any other. He seems, from the text, egotistical, vain, but when he says:

Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of
things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe
and admire myself.

he is speaking in a double sense. He will admire this noble structure, this miracle of a body, which nature has given him, and thus:

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of
 any man hearty and clean;
 Not an inch, nor a particle of an inch, is vile, and
 none shall be less familiar than the rest.

And when the noble body passes back into the
 essence of things,

To die is different from what any one supposed, and
 luckier.

His universality is complete:

Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and
 religion.

And he includes every sort of person because all
 are born of the oneness of flesh and spirit:

I play not marches for accepted victors only — I
 play great marches for conquer'd and slain persons.

And this beautiful tolerance born of common hu-
 manity in him and in all things is deeply expressed
 in the poem called "To a Common Prostitute,"

Not till the sun excludes you, do I exclude you.

And it occurs with profound sympathy in "The
 City Dead House." And it appears with an im-
 patient and satirical accent in the passage begin-
 ning:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are
 so placid and self-contained;

* * * * *

Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole
 earth.

The animals do not own things, or kneel to another; they don't make him sick discussing their duty to God; they have created no artifice to explain the clear meaning of the world of sense and spirit through which all things interflow.

They show their relations to me, and I accept them;
They bring me tokens of myself.

And thus all things flowing into each, Walt Whitman is the things he sees and hears and the conceptions born of these in his imagination. He makes long lists of these, physical and fanciful. The lists have been criticized as "auction catalogues" and much derided. But he has his reason for them as an effort to make the reader understand that all things are equally part of his fabric and that they feed his mind and develop him into the spiritual rightness and universality which nature meant him to imbibe. He is too great an artist not to put into these lists very noble poetry, very perfect epithet, and objective beauty; but like Wordsworth, he is not always at his best; his inspiration flags, though his purpose to explain and to clear the atmosphere of doubt is never lost from his view.

No description, nor quotations manifold, can give the magnificent robustness and rugged music of this poem called "Walt Whitman," which formed the volume of "Leaves of Grass" first published. It

must be read, with the understanding I have pointed out, to give the thrill and the enlightenment which Walt put into it. It was, indeed, an attempt to give the essence of the youthful giant America, forseen and understood by him sooner than by any other of his generation. This it does in a remarkable degree. It is fresh and new in speech, as we were, and are; free in aim and in impulse; it takes new views of body and of mind; it throws away the rubbish of old dogma and what were thought to be principles of life; and it comes out into the open sun of existence, rude, unafraid, truthful, reverent only to the God of Nature. Like the spotted hawk, he says:

I too am not a bit tamed — I too am untranslatable;
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the
world.

And again, as with the Quakers:

I wear my hat as I please, indoors or out.

VII

THE reception of such a book as the "Leaves of Grass" in 1855 was, of course, of varied character. It was a day of seething growth in young America, and many theories were being tried out. Gold was flowing from the unknown West into the channels of business, and commerce was steadily growing in abundance and richness. The intellectual life in its survival from the older civilization was keeping pace with material activity, but except for the novels of Fenimore Cooper and Hawthorne we had little that could be called native literature. In New England there were many experiments in education and in forms of community life, and much transcendental philosophy was evoked whose influence was felt throughout the East. But denominational religion was by no means slackened in its convictions, or in that certain grimness of outward expression which characterized it in that period, so devoid of the beauty of living and freedom of impulse which we now enjoy.

Thus the "Leaves of Grass" was variously received. To Emerson, the leader of liberal thought in New England, it was, as he wrote Walt Whitman, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has contributed"; to Tho-

reau, who was Emerson's close friend and associate in the New England School of Philosophy, Walt was "a great big something, a little more than human," and he felt that if Walt made him blush it was his own fault, the fault of society as now constituted. Alcott, another of that circle of philosophers said: "He is the very god Pan." Walt received visits of approval from the Englishman, Lord Houghton, author of the *Life of Keats*; from Henry Ward Beecher, a noted orator of the pulpit; and from Moncure Conway, who also came through Emerson.

But the book shocked the sense of modesty which men and women had built around themselves in disguise of their own instincts and emotions, and it made little progress against prejudice and convention. Dr. Bucke, one of Walt's friends and his biographer, tells us that

copies were left for sale at various bookstores in New York and Brooklyn. Other copies were sent to magazines and newspapers, and others to prominent literary men. Of those that were placed in the stores none were sold. Those sent to the press were, in quite every instance, either not noticed at all, laughed at, or reviewed with the bitterest and most scurrilous language. Those sent to eminent writers were in several instances returned, in some cases accompanied by insulting notes.

Incidentally, it may be remarked that it would have been a good investment to keep the volume as copies are now worth about \$500.00.

But, Dr. Bucke was not entirely right, as there were indulgent reviews in several leading magazines. There was, however, really little result from the issue of the book, and Walt himself was rather amazed at the apathy that greeted it. He "went off to the east end of Long Island and spent the late summer and fall — the happiest of my life. Then came back to New York with the confirmed resolution, from which I never afterwards wavered, to go on with my poetic enterprize in my own way, and finish it as well as I could."

Thus his determined spirit was not to be put down, and in the next year, 1856, he issued a new edition, adding twenty more poems. This issue won hardly more success than the first, but Walt's reputation was growing, though his income was not. He had the idea of lecturing and produced much copy for it, but his plans led nowhere, though he was ambitious enough to declare in his simple way that as General Washington had freed the country from political dependence on England, Walt Whitman would free it from European ideals. He felt that he was the incarnation of the American spirit.

VIII

HE WAS at this time thirty-six years old. His great frame was magnificent in health, but his hair and beard were white, as they had been for some years. An old friend said: "He had a look of age in youth as he now has a look of youth in age." He was a person of marked size and distinction. His face was full of benign and winning kindness. He was working about half the time, perhaps at type-setting and writing for the papers — he had given up carpentering to avoid, as he whimsically said, growing rich. His friends were increasing in number in spite of the abuse and neglect of his book. They formed a group of gay spirits who wrote for the newspapers and magazines, men and women alike, and they gathered at night in a large bare saloon on Broadway near Bleecker street, kept by a German named Pfaff. Some of them became authors of established note, like the poets Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Edmund Clarence Stedman, and William Winter. The queen of those Bohemian nights was Ada Clare, whom Walt much admired, while the humorist Artemus Ward gave mirth to the discussions of politics, letters, and slavery. I was once told by Mr. Stedman an incident that shows the fame of this set in those days. A young

fellow unknown to them came in and joined the talk. He asked for their names and was told, this is Walt Whitman, this Edmund Clarence Stedman, this T. B. Aldrich — all noted then for their poems and books. He thought this was a joke on him, and when they asked for his name he replied mockingly: Ralph Waldo Emerson!

A night spent in this company by William D. Howells, the novelist, is recorded by him in one of his books, where incidentally he gives a picture of Walt at that day; but even such a literary radical as Howells fails to understand the deep purpose of Walt's break from convention:

The spiritual purity which I felt in him, no less than the dignity, is something that I will no more try to reconcile with what denies it in his page, but such things we may well leave to the adjustment of finer balances than we have at hand. [He had] an address of singular quiet delivered in a voice of winning and endearing quietness.

The period of 1856-60 was one of great productivity in poetry. The next edition of "Leaves of Grass" shows an increase of 122 pieces, which were now being written in all sorts of places. Walt kept up his trips on the ferries and omnibuses, and his free comradeship with people everywhere. Not only was this the inclination of a great democratic heart, but it was providing him with the fabric of his book. It was passing into his pages in realistic

pictures that served the deeper purpose of his great scheme.

The publishers of the second edition of "Leaves of Grass," Fowler and Wells, had been alarmed at the clamor against the book and had thrown up the issue of it, and thus it was out of print until 1860, when Walt found new publishers in Boston, Thayer and Eldridge, a young firm with much boldness and enterprise. He went to Boston and was given a little room at the printers, where he was entirely at home. There had been a rather unhappy incident connected with the second edition of "Leaves of Grass." Walt always had a canny eye on the value of advertisement, and he wanted to use Emerson's amazing letter to him as a recommendation of his book. He hesitated, but on the counsel of Charles A. Dana, Emerson's friend and his, he inserted it in the new volume without asking Emerson's consent. This gave rise to much irritation among Emerson's family and friends, but none was shown by the serene philosopher himself. He had written his letter and he did not fail to stand by it. Being now in Boston, Walt saw much of Emerson and one memorable walk and talk was a real crisis in the life of Whitman.

The additions to the first edition included poems that dealt with the mystery and divinity of sex in a way that was deemed by the standpatter as

flagrantly evil. Such pieces as those now included in "Calamus," and called "The Body Electric" and "A Woman Waits for Me," had offended a society which smugly read them only for the meaning of the surface, which undoubtedly delivered a shock to self-satisfied purity, and failed to perceive their place in the system which thus announced its aims:

Magnifying and applying come I
Outbidding at the start the old cautious huckster
Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah.

Or,

What is known I strip away;
I launch all men and women forward with me into
the Unknown.

Emerson had divined this, and his letter had not too warmly spoken his admiration:

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion, but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

And his view of the criticized pieces is probably expressed in: "I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire." Emerson had visited Walt in New York a number of times and had probably

given his sentiments on the poems of the sexes, but now, on the eve of a new edition, there was a chance for omitting these alleged offences against taste, and thus arose the momentous interview in which Walt and he discussed to a final limit their retention or rejection.

On this day of February, 1860, so notable in the annals of Walt's career, Emerson and he walked up and down the pathways of Boston Common and talked out the difference which alone separated the Disciple and the Master, for so Walt had addressed Emerson in his last edition. Emerson used all those arguments that occur to the enlightened mind in prudence and in policy, as well as in philosophic reasoning, to influence Walt in omitting the passages that hurt a fastidious taste or offended religious principle or habit. It was not wise for his own sake or his books' sake to arouse antagonism, and some decencies must be allowed the conventional even though they were founded on misconception of Nature's plans.

Some such arguments no doubt Emerson, in his winning kindness, advanced to help and correct this great, robust, colossal character which in its untamed license, its deeper insight into error, its loftier conception of Nature's plan, was unnecessarily injuring itself. Walt, he probably held, was defeating the acceptance of his own message by weighting it with these unwelcome passages that

ruthlessly broke through revered, if unwarranted, traditions.

Walt listened in his large, calm way through the two hours of pleading and counsel. He was a devoted disciple of Emerson; he had imbibed much from Emerson's teaching; he held him as the great spiritual force of that day in America, — his beloved America, — but he was unmoved in his convictions. At the end of the sermon, when Emerson asked: "What have you to say to such things?" Walt could only reply: "While I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to my own theory, and exemplify it." And he adds: "Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American House."

The Boston edition of 1860 included what had appeared in the two earlier editions, with new important pieces under the title "Calamus." This is the American name for a reed growing in swamps and ponds by the roadside — another leaf of grass. None of the offending lines was omitted, and many new poems, such as "A Woman Waits for Me," were added. It was not as it might have seemed, an obstinate defiance, but a profound conviction that to leave out these was to leave out the heart of his theme — the unity of all life and its divinity. It is noteworthy that the days and months were numbered in the Quaker manner, now discarded, and names introduced instead. The book sold

better this time, but after the circulation of five or six thousand copies the publishers went down with the crisis of the fast approaching war; and Walt was drifted by the same awful event far from Boston and from the peaceful development of his momentous theme.

IX

THE political and social life of America at the beginning of the 'sixties had been seething with discontent and with desire for regeneration. This was due in a degree to economic conditions. The North desired a tariff to support its advancing manufactures, while the South required to receive its supplies free from tax and to sell its cotton in markets that it favored. But the division was also a moral one — slavery, which had existed in the North to the time of Walt Whitman's childhood, was abolished there, while it flourished more defiantly than ever in the South. The circle of which Emerson was the centre had been valiantly fighting it from New England; Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison — noble names in this crusade for the black slaves — were eloquent in their wrath against it. A President, Buchanan, from Pennsylvania was then elected who temporized with the growing arrogance of the South and brought the anger to a climax.

It was at the close of Buchanan's term that Abraham Lincoln became President, and this great and noble lover of mankind and of his country led the nation into the civil war that had become inevitable. The southern states seceded from the Union, the American flag was fired on by the

South, and no human power could stay the conflict. In patriotic and ethical opposition to the extension of slavery to the new states just entering the Union, and to the practice itself, which was abhorrent to all his human instincts, Walt Whitman was in sympathy with the men and women of New England who were styled Abolitionists. They demanded that slavery be abolished. He called it "the arch-enemy personified." It was a perplexing problem, because the slaves were valuable property and with abolition their owners would suffer great loss. Many theories were offered for a peaceful settlement, but when the South began the war it was clear that if the North won, the slaves would be freed, and in Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" this subsequently happened.

But the war to Walt instantly meant a more personal emotion than hatred of slavery. His brother George had enlisted as an officer in the 51st New York Volunteers. News came that he had been seriously wounded at the first battle of Fredericksburg, in December of 1862, and Walt hurried down to Virginia to be at his bedside.

This event changed the current of Walt's happy life with his cosmic thoughts and his free comradeship with men and women and nature. Henceforth he was dedicated to a great and ennobling duty that brought him joy, but also pain that he never overcame. The song of universal oneness was to be mingled with the agonies of war.

X

The volcanic upheaval of the nation after that firing on the flag at Charleston proved for certain something which had been previously in great doubt, and at once substantially settled the question of disunion. In my judgment it will remain as the grandest and most encouraging spectacle yet vouchsafed in any age, old or new, to political progress and democracy.

THESE are the words of the seer which have come prophetically true. They show how deeply stirred was this soul over the causes and the meaning of the war and they add their profound glow to the immediate occasion of Walt's contact with it. They must be kept in mind, and much of his prose diary must be recalled constantly, in reading the poems, varied, objectively picturesque, inspired and sonorous, which the conflict drew from him.

In the book of his prose writings beginning with "Specimen Days" you will find a record of his devotion to duties self-imposed in the hospitals, first at Fredericksburg and then at Washington, the Capitol city. His brother George was not badly wounded, but Walt saw that his duty lay in these aisles of misery and of heroism. He began at once to read and write letters for patients, and little by little his service grew to affectionate care in tragic ordeals, to the distribution of many little

gifts that lightened pain, and to solemn correspondence with relatives who had been bereft. His passion for comradeship had a great field for its exercise. He made many friends, some very queer ones, others who loved him with noble devotion. He was a solace to the poor fellows in so many ways that his presence in the aisles in his free-flowing gray dress and his broad-brimmed hat, his appearance of negligee readiness for anything, made him more than an angel of mercy to them. He remarks: "I am now able to do a little good, having money (as almoner of others home) and getting experience," and he found means always to raise the modest sums needed. As a method of self-support he began writing letters to the New York and Brooklyn newspapers, and he found copying work to do in the paymaster's office. Thus for two years he lived in his usual disregard of his own future — he did not care what happened to him — and the war wavered back and forth, first favoring the South, then the North, until the defeat of the South at the Battle of Gettysburg and the appearance of General Grant on the scene, when permanent gains began to be perceptible for the anxious North; and the brave heart of Lincoln, whose courage and wisdom had borne the weight of the peril, was justified and relieved.

Whether Walt ever felt the impulse to join the fight is unknown. His Quaker instincts against

war would have discountenanced it; but he saw and declared that the war must be fought through to a victory, and he approved Lincoln's judgment without exception. It is said that he would have obeyed the call if drafted but that he found his duties as the "Wound Dresser" — so he called himself in one of his books — as essential to the union as was the courage of the fighter. The scenes he passed through on the battle-fields and in the hospitals equalled, perhaps, the strain on the man in the ranks. Finally they ate into his strong health and left him, after the war and to his death, a physical wreck.

XI

IN WASHINGTON Walt boarded in the same house as William D. O'Connor and his sympathetic wife and two children. They became close friends. Although O'Connor had known Walt in Boston and had issued his novel of the Abolitionist cause, called "Harrington," through Walt's publishers, Thayer and Eldridge, he had not been his especial advocate and disciple until now. He took Walt's cause for his own with fiery eloquence both in speech and in print, as we shall see later, and "The Good Gray Poet," as he called him, found a warm circle of admirers in his company.

O'Connor had secured a clerkship in the Lighthouse Bureau of the Government and was thus able to pursue his literary work without dependence on its uncertain income. He was impulsive, generous, very widely read in the poetry and fiction of Europe and full of that Celtic enthusiasm which Walt lacked but admired. He contributed a story later to Putnam's magazine, called "The Carpenter," in which Walt vaguely appears as an embodiment of a persecuted Christ. To his house came John Burroughs, the naturalist, then a Government clerk, and E. C. Stedman, one of the poets of Pfaff's cellar, who was correspondent for

New York newspapers in Washington. Hubley Ashton, another chum of the circle, gives this picture of Walt at that day:

He was wearing army boots, his sleeves rolled up, his coat was slung across his arm. He had just come in with a train-load of wounded from the front. Very picturesque he looked as he stood there, stalwart, unconventional, majestic, an heroic American figure.

Walt ordered his life, in its extreme simplicity of diet and other needs, to the service of the dying and wounded. There were at one time fifty hospitals in and near Washington, and though he was but one of many ministrants he found work for every hour of the day and night. He rose early and worked late; his one recreation was a long walk into the country either at early morning, or at night — sometimes with friends — when he could be restored by the restful stars; and he refreshed the patients by bringing in to them bunches of wild-flowers he gathered by the way. He wrote to the "Brooklyn Eagle": "I can testify that friendship has literally cured a fever, and the medicine of daily affection a bad wound." He was putting into practice the potency of comradeship, which was the text of his poem — comradeship of men and women among themselves and with the universe.

The funds to keep up his bounties were never wanting. Emerson, among others, was contribut-

ing, and in all Walt was provided with about \$6,000, which went for postage stamps, ice cream, writing paper, magazines and daily papers, tobacco, and fruit.

But his own livelihood was precarious. He had no means of support but his letters to newspapers; and his magnificent health began to feel the strain of his devotion to duty. The heat of the Washington summers is often oppressive, and, at last, under this he gave out and went home in the latter part of 1864, to find restoration in the society of his family and especially of his beloved mother. The affection he felt for her throughout her life and until the close of his own was one of his profoundest emotions. There was a certain clannish loyalty to home-folks, which is a Quaker trait, but for his mother he felt almost an adoration of love. She was his resource in trials and his comfort in happiness, and to her many of the moving letters about the wounded soldiers were written. Thus he went back to her in the first illness of his life, and as she was anxious about Jeff, who was subject to draft in the army and was the bread-earner of the family, and about George, who was in the thick of the fighting, no doubt Walt's return gave her much comfort. He stayed at home in Brooklyn for about six months, but he never got back his lusty health, and at forty-five he was deprived of some of his most cherished activities.

He had written his mother before he grew ill that he thought of going home for a time to put out a book he was completing, and during his enforced idleness he finished and issued "Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps." This consisted of one or two pieces written before he went to Washington, but was mainly inspired by the war and by his heavy experiences with the suffering. The opening lines, added in 1870, show his purpose:

Aroused and angry,
I thought to be at the alarum, and urge relentless war;
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd, and
I resign'd myself,
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently
watch the dead.

The little volume is now incorporated in the final form of "Leaves of Grass," and I shall attempt no separate description of it here; but as a biographical note in Walt's career it should be read in its place, and the strain, which becomes descriptive and tragic, should be contrasted with the earlier exultant and defiant chanting.

Walt had come back to Washington even in his unfit condition, in December, 1864, and had resumed his rounds of the hospitals. The capture of his brother George by the Rebels may have hastened his return, and it increased the alarm of the whole family, for the Southern prisons were shambles of death. George was later exchanged for some

Confederate officer, and though his health was impaired he lived long after the war and settled in Camden, New Jersey, which was the occasion for Walt's going there in his later years.

Before the edition of "Drum-Taps" was fully launched the darkest tragedy of the war had taken place. President Lincoln was assassinated by an actor of Southern birth and sympathies named John Wilkes Booth. The heroic leader, heaped with abuse and misunderstood, as was Walt, in his ideals of righteousness and human sympathy, was killed on the altar of the people's rights. He had led the nation through the valley of despair to a new dawn of Union, and his reward was martyrdom. The whole world was shocked and thrilled. The sacrifice was a national atonement, a new crucifixion, and Lincoln was crowned with sainthood.

Thus was Walt affected by the dark event, and he poured out from his full soul a strain that surpassed all he had uttered, and all that has been uttered since, about the dead Father Abraham.

The copies of "Drum-Taps" remaining unsold were then rebound with a sequel inserted which contained this inspired dirge and one or two other pieces.

Whitman had never spoken to Lincoln, but had seen him in New York, and often in Washington, and had loved and revered him from a distance. Lincoln is known once to have noticed Walt as he

passed the White House and to have asked who he was. "Well," he declared, "he looks like a man." The two great spirits had much in common. Neither enjoyed any education to speak of and yet both were more learned in the wisdom of humanity than the most erudite of their day. Their "lives in low estate began," but the aims that inspired them were in the end attained. They suffered alike the mistrust and contumely that are heaped on those who bring us life's best gifts, who carry us forward to new and better conceptions of duty and happiness, and who plant freedom, like a flag farthest North, on the frontiers of Truth. But Lincoln was a great national and international figure, while Whitman, not an actor in the mighty events of his time, is only their celebrant, their singer. He says wisely of Lincoln in his prose lecture:

Four mighty and primal hands will be needed to complete the limning of this man's future portrait — the eyes and brains and finger-touch of Plutarch and Eschylus and Michael Angelo, assisted by Rabelais.

Walt's own dirge for the murdered President, in its sonorous harmonies of grief and its deeps of understanding, fulfills all that poetry could do to wring tears and picture the nobility of his beloved subject. In his clearly visualizing prose narrative of the scenes in Washington of which he himself was a part, he says:

I remember where I was stopping at the time, the season being advanced, there were many lilacs in bloom. By one of those caprices that enter and give tinge to events without being at all part of them, I find myself always reminded of the great tragedy of that day by the light and odor of these blossoms.

And thus his poem opens with the scent of this lovely purple flower in its lines; and the oldest and dearest of his memories in the home at West Hills, the love of his mother, which equalled the love of Lincoln for his mother, and the homely life, so paralleling Lincoln's, all these become part of the emotion with which he mourns for the noblest American, the savior of "These States," and their human embodiment.

In another poem named "O Captain, my Captain," the most popularly known of his pieces, he shows the same admiration for the dead President in a metrical form more conventional than any in his book. Lincoln, indeed, to him, was a deep personal sentiment, as well as a lofty national guide and landmark:

Dear to the muse, thrice dear to Nationality — to
the whole human race — precious to this Union —
precious to Democracy — unspeakably and for-
ever precious — their first great Martyr-Chief.

XII

THE war was not yet over, but it was drawing to a close. In 1864 Walt had secured a clerkship in the Indian Bureau of the Interior Department of the United States Government. This was to him a congenial position, though it paid but little. He liked the contact with the American natives which this brought him, and they liked him. His sympathy and comradeship here had a field for their full employment.

But he was not to be allowed to hold this post very long. He was again pursued by the furies of superior virtue. He was preparing the copy for a new edition of "Leaves of Grass," and he had in a drawer of his desk the volume of 1860, in which he was making some corrections for the press. A clerk who was not friendly told the Chief Clerk of the fact, and the volume was slyly taken to the head of the Department, Secretary of the Interior James Harlan. A note was quickly issued by this narrow official in which Walt was dismissed without appeal. His friends were deeply indignant at this barbarity to the devoted hospital nurse and loyal poet of "Drum-Taps," and O'Connor secured the aid of Hubley Ashton in having the offence

tempered by the transfer of Walt to the Department of the Attorney-General.

In this new office he remained for about six years. He liked the light work and he especially enjoyed the view from his office window, which carried the eye out to the lovely vistas of the Potomac. I have heard President Wilson speak of the tranquilizing effect of this view from the White House, and to the reflective poet it must have brought like sensations of peace and insight.

Walt lived in a boarding-house with fellow clerks, and speculation arises over his contentment with this sort of life. But it is not strange that his brooding mind should be glad of a rest from the ardors of his first adventures in print, which contained the fulness of his great proclamation, and from his hospital duties, which took so much from him in health and in sympathy. His book was finished in its largest sense, he had his first fixed income, his health was failing and he had good friends around him. Thus he lived, with a month's visit to his mother in the summer, while his fame slowly grew through the shock of his arresting announcement and the curiosity aroused by his wrongs and by his uncommon personality, but more especially through the genuine seeds of truth and illumination which were scattered by his message. He had written for and of Democracy; he loved the common man; but by a freak of fate his earliest supporters

of influence and note were the highly cultivated and patrician literary men and women of England. The Rossetti brothers, the poet Dante Gabriel, and the critic William Michael had discovered the wonderful book, "Leaves of Grass," and spread the news amongst their friends. Tennyson found it so moving, so suggestive and colossal that he wrote Walt, and the correspondence continued through many years. The precious letters from Tennyson Walt used to keep in the inside pocket of his gray coat. I have seen him make a gesture to such effect when they were spoken of. Swinburne, the lyrical poet, dedicated to him one of his "Songs before Sunrise," the sentiments of which he afterwards unhandsomely recanted. Walt only said: "Isn't he the damnedest simulacrum?" But Swinburne received a merited chastisement from another English poet, in which the lash was freely applied with great lyrical power. This was Sir Rennell Rodd, the former English Ambassador to Italy. John Addington Symonds, W. Bell Scott, and other lesser lights greeted him as a new sun of truth in poetry and life.

But his English friends most useful in spreading the news of his advent there and in his own country were Mrs. Alexander Gilchrist and William M. Rossetti, to whom he always remained attached in a devoted manner. Mrs. Gilchrist was the wife of Alexander Gilchrist, the author of the "Life of William Blake" and the Life of the painter, Etty.

She was thus a liberal spirit, highly cultivated, simple in her tastes, and full of the emotion of profound poetry. She was immediately responsive to Walt's impassioned appeal, and it struck from her brilliant mind two articles which for the first time showed how a woman could view Walt's supposed sins against chastity. So profoundly was she affected by this theme of life that she came to the United States in the year 1876 and settled for a year or two in Philadelphia. This was ostensibly to educate her daughter in a Philadelphia Medical School, but it is doubtful if such a motive alone would have brought her so far with her whole family. She saw much of Walt at her little house near the Woman's College, and their relations became intimate. There is correspondence in existence that signifies the warmth and love with which she regarded the poet, and he returned the sentiment in many kindly ways and in writing her letters throughout his life which show deep affection. There is a fine passage in his prose which expresses the gratitude he felt for her support at the critical time when it was most needed.

I never met Mrs. Gilchrist, but I grew intimate with her son, Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist, who came to Philadelphia as an instructor in composition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts several years after the family had returned to England. He was a young artist of great promise

and many traits that won friendship. He painted a portrait of Walt and finally settled at Centreport near Walt's birthplace on Long Island where the son of another early friend of Walt's was living, Eustace Conway. I visited there more than once, and our comradeship was always close in common attachment to Walt.

Out of the Rossettis' admiration for the power and beauty of "Leaves of Grass" came in 1868 a select collection of the pieces, forming the first English publication. William M. Rossetti had written an article which set the English critics talking, and so much success had it that Walt consented to the issue of a volume, which omitted the poems that Emerson might have felt like leaving out. This little book gave substance to Walt's fame in England, and reflected it in his own country.

In 1870 came the fifth issue of "Leaves of Grass," with rearrangements and additions as always; and at the same time appeared a smaller volume called "Passage to India," all of which is now incorporated in the final form of "Leaves of Grass," which will be spoken of hereafter. In 1871 there came out a pamphlet in prose called "Democratic Vistas" in which Whitman surveys the future of the democratic idea as embodied in his beloved United States. All these prose works should be enjoyed and held dear by the reader; and the political background of the after-years of the war should be studied in their light.

It was a time of heavy and forlorn upheaval. Lincoln the pilot was gone, and his successor Johnson was a mere weak politician, whose impeachment for avoidable sins in office was demanded freely. Walt's voice was not heeded politically, but his words are prophetic and healing; and the so-called World War has made them immensely significant. He, more than our statesmen, saw where democracy led; he more profoundly stands for what the New World, chastened by war, will give us.

XIII

WALT WHITMAN was now, in 1873, fifty-four years old. His mission was fulfilled in part, though the world was still unaware of his great design. He had lived for ten years in Washington and was apparently satisfied with his simple lot. His brother, Colonel George Whitman, had set up a modest house in Camden, New Jersey, a lesser town across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, and there the mother had gone to live when Jeff went to St. Louis as engineer of the water works. It appears that so far back as 1864 Walt had had premonitions of a coming crisis in his health. He had become infected in assisting to dress a wound, and his arm and shoulder swelled threateningly. He reacted at that time, but his well-being was afterward never so perfect as before. He was still at his desk every day up to the 22nd of February, 1873. That night he started for his homely lodgings not far away, after an evening spent in the Treasury Building with a novel of Lord Lytton. The guard, as he passed out into the sleety night, noticed that he looked badly and proposed to see him home, but this he declined. Between then and four the next morning he had suffered a stroke of paralysis on the left side.

In the morning his friend Peter Doyle, a young Irish car-conductor who had been in the Confederate ranks and who was one of Walt's unaccountable pets, with Charles Eldridge and John Burroughs, found him helpless and did all that could be done to relieve him. He wrote immediately to his mother, the resource in every hour of need, and he gazed at her picture hung at the foot of his bed, as a talisman of luck and love.

Bad fortune came in quantities that year, for now Jeff's wife, who was much loved by the family, died in St. Louis; and early in May the venerated mother, transplanted from her habitual home in Brooklyn, expired after a brief illness. Walt, though still very feeble, was able to reach George's house in Camden before she died, and in that uneventful, plain little town he lived to the end of his life. The time was one of grief beyond description for the son who so passionately loved her. He tried to make for the sea, his surcease in pain and pleasure, but he fell into a relapse and was taken back to Colonel Whitman's house, a wreck of filial sorrow and physical collapse. Here he passed through months at the brink of death, and in misery the more bitter because his great frame, formed for enjoyments within his reach, refused to act. There were the ferries to Philadelphia, across the broad Delaware River, and at his threshold almost, was the great level, sandy plain of New Jersey, a place of abun-

dant harvests of grain and berries, of wild flowers and trees and slow-moving streams, such as Walt knew so well in Long Island. But the stout heart that had written his mother when the stroke crippled him, not to be worried for once before they had killed him off, could not always exist under the weight of depression. His hopeful philosophy no doubt came to his support, and although the spells were frequent and sometimes it was long before he could hobble outdoors, yet his condition was not hopeless, and the reviving spirits came in the end. He would say, "If only I felt just a little better, I could get acquainted with many of the men." The railroad to the sea lay almost next him, and the "hands" there he was eager to know. They were his sort, human, natural, real.

Suffering must be woven into the thread of his poems as well as exultation and health. Thus this period saw the production of such pieces as the pathetic "Prayer of Columbus," with its accent of Tennyson's "Ulysses," both poems somewhat biographical. "Song of the Universal" was written by invitation for Tufts College, in 1874. This was an indication of approval that was repeated by other institutions as time passed and fame grew. He had already contributed, in 1871, "Song of the Exposition" for the American Institute of New York, and pretty soon Dartmouth College was to ask him for a piece, which he called "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free."

All this time Walt was kept on the pay-roll at Washington with a substitute doing his work, but a new Solicitor-General came into office in 1874 and dropped him. He had been sick for a year and a half, and this treatment was not harsh. He could never hope to return to work, his task lay with his book. But poverty as well as disease was overtaking him. He had no means of support. Colonel George's household consisted only of the three, but George, no doubt, had to support Edward, the demented brother, and though George was prosperous as an inspector of pipes, he doubtless felt that Walt should contribute something for his own sustenance. The book was selling more widely, but Walt was cheated out of part of his returns by those in New York to whom he had entrusted the business. Thus the outlook was pretty dark, but the soul within him had not died. He began to travel now and then, with John Burroughs to Washington, and with Peter Doyle, who was very constant. Letters to newspapers about his pathetic condition appeared, in the devoted *Springfield* (Mass.) *Republican*, and more notably the *London Daily News*, by the poet Robert Buchanan, a fast friend whom he never saw. The *London Athenaeum*, the critical arbiter of England, now published his "To a Man of War Bird," a lyric that stands beside Shelley in its music and emotion. Rossetti also asked how he could best

serve him, and Walt replied that he was now his own publisher of the "Centennial Edition," a name given to the great exposition at Philadelphia which celebrated American Independence in 1876, and that his friends might help him by buying this book. There was a generous outflow of patronage from the most distinguished names in England. But Walt was still an enigma and a target to many misguided people. The *New York Tribune* was attacking him constantly, and Dr. Bucke tells us the writer of the abuse was Bayard Taylor, a formal poet of that day.

Things were going a little better, and, as always, Walt made for the open country. This was his unfailing resource. The spring of 1876 arrived, and in early May he drove out to Whitehorse, ten miles beyond Camden, on a picturesque old turnpike leading to the sea, which is about sixty miles across the state. Not far from the old tavern which gave the place its name was the farmhouse of George Stafford. Here Walt became domesticated whenever he chose to, and here he spent some of the happiest days of his life. Timber creek flowed nearby, and those who read Walt's "Specimen Days," his prose diary of this time, will get a picture of the place that no other words could supply. This record stretched from 1876 to 1882. The Stafford farm, as well as Stafford's subsequent wayside store at Glendale, became the resort of Walt's growing number of friends as well as himself.

XIV

BETWEEN the years 1876 and 1884 the life of Walt Whitman was full of new friends and new scenes. Dr. Bucke, of London, Ontario, Canada, became his advocate, and J. H. Johnston, of New York, entertained him much. He paid visits to John Burroughs and to friends in Philadelphia, including Mrs. Gilchrist, and he travelled to the great West of the United States, seeing the prairies, the desert, and the Rocky Mountains, and to Canada and the Great Lakes. He enjoyed himself as his quick sympathies with human and outdoor nature enabled him to do, and he laid up stores of impressions and convictions for his poems and prose. He also paid a new visit to Boston and again met Emerson in intimate companionship. His adoration of this great man comes out in his vivid notes of this visit in "Specimen Days."

On these times he reflects:

How or why I know not, just at the moment, but I too muse and think of my best friends in their distant homes — of William O'Connor, of Maurice Bucke, of John Burroughs, and of Mrs. Gilchrist — friends of my soul — stanchest friends of my other soul, my poems.

While he was in Boston he made an arrangement with Osgood, the publisher, for a new edition of

"Leaves of Grass," and the volume was quickly issued in its integrity. But self-conscious hypocrisy soon stopped its flow by an appeal to the District Attorney in Boston, who, supplied with evidence by the smug Society for the Suppression of Vice, demanded the excision of lines and passages all through the book. They had probably understood nothing of the text but those passages which they alleged to be objectionable. Thus the guest of Emerson and Sanborn and the finest and purest men and women of Boston and Concord, the friend of Tennyson and Longfellow, and of Mrs. Gilchrist was found unclean by an anonymous group who were unqualified to receive the rich message he brought them.

Walt then bound the remaining copies in green cloth and issued them himself. He finally turned the whole business of publishing over to David McKay, of Philadelphia, who became his devoted friend and counsellor, and who put forth and sold thousands of his books. Again persecution had defeated itself. It sold out the new McKay edition and left Walt the gainer by \$1,500 at the end of the season.

The year 1884 was signalized by a new move of great importance to Walt. He purchased a small frame shack, as he called it, on Mickle Street, Camden, not far from Colonel George Whitman's house, where he had been so generously cared for

through his years of suffering. Here he set up housekeeping on his own account; he gathered about him all his possessions for the first time in his life, and he had a friendly widow, Mrs. Davis, to take care of him and the house. This plain little abode in a shabby street became the resort of old friends and many new ones through all the years that remained to him.

XV

THERE is a letter of 1884 to R. Pearsall Smith, an acquaintance in Germantown, Philadelphia, in which Walt writes:

“Give my excuses and love to Mr. and Mrs. Williams and Churchey.” The friends mentioned are Francis Howard Williams and his wife, and their son Churchill, of Germantown, Philadelphia, who, with the Pearsall Smith family, entertained Walt much in these years, especially at Christmas, when he loved to be with the Williams children.

Incidentally, among the droll things always happening among Walt’s circle, as I suppose with any figure so great as to be but partly understood, I may mention that this Pearsall Smith once brought to Francis Howard Williams a complete will obligingly drawn up for Walt to execute. In it Williams, George W. Childs, of the *Philadelphia Ledger*, whose obituary poetry was not without its comic flavor, and Pearsall Smith himself were made literary executors of Walt’s estate. Williams, of course, declined to ask Walt to sign it; and “Besides,” said he, “the name of Mr. Childs is not George Washington, but George William”; which quite extinguished the effort of Mr. Smith.

It was through my friend Mr. Williams that I

was taken over to Mickle Street and presented to Walt.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and we sat on the little wooden steps and the cellar door, now removed. I remember being shown the beginnings of a poem, strung on white thread and written on all sorts of odd pieces of paper, including the edges of newspapers, each successive draft coming nearer the desired perfection of phrase and sound.

Of this first visit I have the following notes, which are set down just as I pencilled them over forty years ago:

June 8, 87. At 3 p.m. Frank Williams and I started for Camden to pay a visit to Walt Whitman. The river was misty and the sky overcast, making some pretty water-pictures of dull gray, mixed with hulls and rigging, with an occasional spot of green thrown in. W. W. lives on Mickle Street above Third. His house is a two-story frame building, painted a sort of olive color in general with dark brown borders at the extremities. A pavement next door was being re-laid when we arrived, so we walked up abreast of his house on the opposite side and crossed over, just as the "Good Gray" came out to his door-step to look up and down. He was seated on the top step when we got over, and greeted F. W. cordially. I was then introduced, and we had talked a few moments when Mrs. Davis, his housekeeper, a blue-eyed Jersey-looking woman, came down the street. A large carriage dog was with her, which proved to belong to Walt. Mrs. D. went in and closed the vestibule door. A little boy from the neighborhood now came up and looked in a friendly way at us. He was invited to the arms of the poet, and proceeded to fondle

Williams' mustache and my sleeve-buttons. Walt told him not to disturb his friends but that he might fumble with *him* as much as he pleased. Williams spoke of Mr. Pearsall Smith, and W. W. said, "I think his daughter had a child who was to be named Rachel," and told Williams to tell Mrs. W. as women always like to know such things. He said also they would probably call her Ray. The little chap said *his* name was Raymond, and I replied that he'd truly be a ray of sunshine if his cheeks were washed — for he was unconscionably dirty — but Walt said that did not matter, and gave him a smacking kiss in the midst of the smudge on his left cheek. We talked of Mr. Gilchrist who had just brought out the memoirs of his mother Anne Gilchrist and who called on W. W. yesterday, and of Alexander Gilchrist's "Life of Blake." W. W. said Blake was a queer fellow with "streaks of poetry in him." We then talked about "Leaves of Grass" and "November Boughs" which, he said, was in a "nebulous state." I praised the name, which he said John Burroughs also liked. I asked him if he were writing anything, and he said no, talking indeed then and later as if he were done with poetry — had finished his task and rested satisfied. I spoke of the evident artistic qualities which some passages of the Leaves possessed in spite of his theories, and instanced "mad, naked Summer night." He was not displeased at this, but began to tell his method of composition. It seems he has a sort of method. He said an idea would strike him which after mature thought he would consider fit to be the "spinal" theme of a "piece." This he would revolve in his mind in all its phases and finally adopt, setting it down crudely on a bit of paper — the back of an envelope or any scrap, which he would place in an envelope. Then he would lie in wait for any other material which might bear upon or lean toward that idea, and as it came to his mind he would put it on paper and place it in the same envelope. After he had quite

exhausted the supply of suggestions, or had a sufficient number to interpret the idea withal, he would interweave them into a "piece," as he called it. I asked him about the arrangement or succession of the slips, and he said they always fell properly into place. He added that there were scores of girls and boys — more boys than girls however — who had been looking about for some expression of the large new life we live, who did not know exactly what they wanted but who found nothing to satisfy them. He implied that he thought it was his mission to do that. I said I thought he was giving us a characteristic autochthonous literature and that none other save Hawthorne had ever illustrated thoroughly any phase of our national life. He said Hawthorne was morbid, and I replied that in being so he quite fulfilled the expression of the Puritan life he portrayed. I contended that a story like the "Gray Champion" put us down bodily in the streets of Puritan Boston, just as "Pippa Passes" carries us to the heart of Italy; but that "Hiawatha" seemed to me merely an American gentleman's view of the uncivilized America. He replied that he quite endorsed this criticism, and seemed to accept it very favorably. I told him I thought him a modern Chaucer who is giving the world to come pictures of our times which are thoroughly authentic. Williams said Walt had been called by many names, and that was quite a new one.

Williams asked W. W. to show us a model which a Mr. Morse of Boston is making of him. He got up from the step and called Mrs. Davis, who took us through the house to the yard, where she undid the clay model from a heap of boxes and swathings of wet cloth. It represented the poet in his armchair and though only just begun was a very striking likeness. We then went back to the front room where Walt had seated himself in the identical armchair. The room was in a perfect riot of confusion. Surrounding W. W.'s feet were books,

old shoes, newspapers, pamphlets, stools, in a wild disorder and a foot deep at least. He had some flowers on his window sill, and below the ledge proper a wide shelf of plain board which carried his writing instruments. He sat in the midst of this debris as placid as if all were correct and luxurious. Around the walls were various pictures — a large old Dutch portrait over the mantel-piece and a large portrait of President Cleveland belonging to Professor Morse on top of some books. On the mantel was a mass of portraits — Emerson, Wilson, Barrett, Tennyson with an autograph, and a host more notables and unnoted. The books were strange bed-fellows: Homer and Roden Noel and other such combinations. After a word about Henry Murger, whose poem W. read a translation of at the Contemporary Club, and good-byes, we parted for the boat, looking back once to see him through the flowers at his window, a druid of tempestuous white beard and hair and fine large-domed brow.

Mention here of Herbert Gilchrist and his portrait of Walt makes it appropriate to bring him into hand-touch through extracts from some of his letters to me of this time and later — letters full of his charming naïveté, of his lovable and honest character. His life was really a veiled tragedy: for though he painted much, and exhibited often in the Royal Academy in London, and though he was the friend of John Sargent and his sister, and of Henry James in familiar parties at Sargent's house; yet his art never sustained him, nor reached the standard which his brave cheerfulness assumed for it. Keats said: "There is no

fiercer hell than the failure in a great attempt," and poor Gilchrist, with his confiding happiness, not always real, found out this bitterness. In the end he snuffed out his career, like a comedian who hides his grief under a courageous smile.

Of course it was Gilchrist's mother who meant most to Walt. Her early espousal of his cause in London was, he acknowledges, one of the greatest things that ever happened to him. Of her Herbert writes in 1893: "I am sorry that you never saw my mother. She never regarded herself as a 'woman champion.' A quiet English lady who wrote a few brave intelligent words about Whitman."

In a letter of 1906 to Mrs. Morris, he writes:

I am so glad that my mother's character appeals to you. I think that you would have liked her very much — she was a great favorite in America amongst those who met her. She had a particularly pleasant time in Boston. She was very unselfish and her standards were high. I am so pleased you like the book ("Anne Gilchrist, Her Life and Writings"). My father was a great biographer; and it was a liberal education living with my mother, so you can see its merits, if it has any, are partly derivative.

He speaks of reprinting the book in handier, or more convenient form, and adds: "But then there is no hurry, for Mother was a little ahead of her time, and every year will remedy that."

Of his portrait of Walt there is this: "My large

Walt Whitman portrait is about to be engraved by some eminent French engraver, name not decided; and to be published either by McLean or Colnaghi."

Dr. Bucke, Walt's biographer and valued friend, paid a visit to Tennyson in the Isle of Wight, upon which Gilchrist jocosely says:

I wonder, oh I wonder, what Tennyson thought of "Walt's Brother"? I can see Lady T. closing and opening her eyes languidly while "the Doctor" discussed in brassy tones about *Wāālt*. There will be a society started soon to prove that Bucke inspired "Leaves of Grass" and that W. W. merely lent his name.

Again, in the same letter: "Lowell, talking to my friend Carpenter in Boston, said of Walt Whitman, 'There is something in the man!' I wonder whether that something will not last as long as that something in Lowell?"

And yet, after his own fun over Dr. Bucke, he writes me in a chastening vein:

Perhaps I am wrong; but I do think you miss it with Walt; as to his personality and his poems. Personally, — you insist on taking a humorous view. You will have him as the funny, picturesque old man à la Dickens! A Toby Veck or something less amiable. He appears to me as a Great Man, a Genius, and his appearance at this particular hour, in this *sophisticated* country, as marvelously *providential*. Personally, always a great man, always dignified; yes, when he was the host at his own rough dinner-table; — for the rest he should be studied as we observe a tree or a rock, scientifically, *reverently*.

After all, my comment on this would be: That, as young fellows in the effulgence of a mighty radiance, I think we did fairly well to see its under side and to penetrate through the overpowering influences and emotions which might have made us as lacking in humor as some of the other satellites.

Even Gilchrist sees nothing to raise a smile in such a message from him to me as this, after Walt's death: "I have Walt's hat and togs and coat, etc., safely, tho' McCune dispatched each object separately!" Nor in this:

The chalk drawing of W. that I made at *his personal request* depicted him under a large walnut tree at Mr. Stafford's farm, in his shirt-sleeves. I gave it to him (framed) 15 years ago — he was pleased, but ultimately stuck it behind his wash-stand, or somewhere . . . but as you see by Mrs. Whitman's note (enclosed) Bucke the omniverous has already pounced down on it, and I am glad it should have brought in a little something to the estate.

Gilchrist's sense of humor does overtake him as he writes this, for he adds, after the "wash-stand," in brackets, "I think a little Lamb humor might come in here"— an allusion to my constant wonder what Charles Lamb would have said to the doings of Walt's friends.

The allusion to Stafford's farm recalls again Timber Creek, of the slow-winding course through the rich green meadows of New Jersey, outside of

Camden. This, as I have said, was Walt's retreat into nature, and his close friends sometimes found him there and liked to stay at the farm-house with him.

A letter from Gilchrist says, in 1892,

Would you very kindly, when you and yours have looked at the Pall Malls and the Society paper, mail them all to Mrs. George Stafford, Ashland, Camden County, New Jersey. I have decided to remain here with W. — mother and sisters (Stafford) until 2.30, etc.

And once again: "Last Thursday Mr. Edwin Stafford, of Winslow, drove me to Mr. J. Wharton's place, Batsto, and we talked to the man who lives in Mr. J. Wharton's cottage, etc."

Mr. Wharton was my father-in-law, hence the allusion; but my motive in keeping these letters in view is to repeat that the Staffords were Walt's most useful and comfortable friends and their personalities and addresses ought not to be lost; neither should the vistas of drowsy, lovely Timber Creek be lost from among Walt's most soothing influences.

There are two ways of thinking about the gossip in later letters, those of 1906 and 1907, when Walt's memory was flowing into books like Bliss Perry's "Life" and others. One way would be toward reticence. The other, and likelier Walt's way in most things, would be in frank avowal. I adopt the latter in giving what Gilchrist wrote,

but of course only from rumor, for nobody ever extorted from Walt any more about his "times South" than I have already quoted.

Gilchrist writes:

I should be the last person to gossip about Walt. I cannot remember who told me that, it probably was not authentic. I thought it was known that two of W.'s sons wished to visit him on his death bed, but were refused. And it was explained to me that W. was acting consistently. I imagine that, if true, his father-in-law finding W. W. something of a wandering minstrel acted with American decision and drew up some deed of separation. Can't you imagine some old Yankee file doing such a thing? But it may not be true and is only unreliable hearsay.

And in another letter about the same time:

There is no evidence that he had the temperament of Rousseau. Walt was eminently a sane, healthy man. As for children, I understand that he agreed to sign a contract never to see his wife or children again, with his father-in-law, and he kept his contract. When one reflects that a man of genius is a child with the passion of six grown men, I think the world has n't much fault to find with them. It seems to me that your attitude to Walt is a wise one and is like my Mother's attitude, too, toward genius.

And I cannot omit, though irrelevant, from the same letter this glimpse of Walt's old friend John Burroughs, also in a rôle not far from funny.

As a camper-out B. is all . . . [word omitted]. My eye! He stayed with me at Long Island; he wanted all the

“modern improvements.” And when my boat was blown bottom upward three miles from my farm-house, he completely lost his temper and *swore!!* I had it all right in a trice.

If I were a poet I would write something about that lovely dell we drove to. W. W.’s birthplace made an impression on me which was intensified by your reading of the Lincoln Hymn — very grand, I must think. Walt has sent me a big budget of interesting papers.

These are only a few filaments from a correspondence of singular sweetness and of exemplary sentiment woven through many years of friendship. It is one of the merits of a great man like Walt that his “corona” of associations, the edges of the glory which belongs to him alone, is full of characters only less brilliant than his own. And the Gilchrists, mother and son, were, with Traubel and Harned and Clifford and the rest, people of a devoted loyalty which grew out of convictions formed when to follow Walt was not a badge of honor among the unelect. There was, in skeptical eyes, something ridiculous, something banal, something immoral in the contact with the poet. But the rightness of Nature has moved along to the justification of all Walt’s early friends, who found in him those comforts of profound truth, that opening of the bud of beauty, which are now, consciously or unconsciously, the help of all.

Other notes of this same year, 1887, are thus recorded:

Aug. 15, 1887. — A cloudy afternoon, dull gray in hue and chilly enough if one were not active.

F. W. (Francis Howard Williams) and Col. C. (Colin Campbell Cooper, landscape painter) and I started at 3.30 for Camden upon a visit to Walt Whitman, principally to see a portrait of him lately painted by Gilchrist who has been staying in Camden for the purpose. As Williams, after looking through the open front window and finding W. W. in the room, opened the vestibule door, he was greeted by a deep barking from the carriage dog which lives upon the premises. The vicious beast was in the dining-room, back with Mrs. Davis, but at the sound of W. W.'s voice he soon ceased to bark, and we were all welcomed into the front room, where the "Good Gray" lay dozing on the sofa in his shirt-sleeves and slippers. He said he had a head-ache and was resting a little. The room was somewhat changed since my last visit. Folding doors between it and the back room had been thrown open and exhibited the bed in which W. W. sleeps — crawling to it with difficulty, doubtless, as he has to support himself with a cane even to move the few steps necessary to reach the mantelpiece (from which he handed me a photo of Mrs. Gilchrist). The big yellow chair still stood by the open window, and the circle of debris and old books (from which we angled out a bundle tied with a bit of rope and labelled "November Boughs" which I suggested, and Williams offered, to open but which Walt forbade us to do, saying, "That corner, anyhow, is kind o' sacred," or some such words) lay in a heap about its rockers, but the table, piled up half-way to the ceiling with books, had been brought between the windows and covered part of the rubbish. Walt lay on a sofa between the folding doors and just above him, against one of them, was hung Gilchrist's vivid but not altogether satisfactory picture. The talk was of Mrs. Gilchrist whom he characterized with a number of carefully

chosen epithets as if he tried to sum up her nature in a word, and of young G.'s book. We then spoke of Joachim Miller, of whom he told a good anecdote. When the former lived in New York, Walt visited him in his room. Miller said, "I s'pose you think it's strange for me to live here." W. said he did n't think anything about it. Miller then alluded to some pictures of the Virgin and other religious emblems in glowing yellows and blues which hung on the wall, and said he had found them there, and as the room suited him he took it on account of the pictures which recalled his early life in California. This was told upon my saying that Miller was announced to be writing a poetical life of Christ and my marvelling that he should be so orthodox. Walt said the fact was "fishy," but that Miller had a "strain" of religion in him. Walt said he liked the reverential trait. F. H. W. said it seemed to be dying out, and W. replied that probably the decay of the old forms of its expression really indicated its renewed strength among us. We were getting rid of the false and adopting the true article. He said that Miller would likely have told him if such a work were in hand for the last fifteen years, because he never concealed such facts. He was, rather, very free to talk of his own affairs, not in an egotistical way but as a child who says, "Me want this, or me want or do that, etc." W. seemed to feel provoked at Thomas Donaldson's speech at the Contemporary Club, but he really exhibited a strong characteristic of personal esteem in his remarks about the speech.

Williams asked him what he thought of the Whitman Club which has recently been proposed in Boston. He said, "There is a Latin word of three letters which expresses my opinion, N-I-L. The productions of Walt Whitman will have to take their chances with everything else." He further said his advice was like that of Punch to the young man about to be married — Williams crying, "Don't!" Then we went away. Williams,

by the way, asked him, apropos, if he did n't believe in the protection of home industries, but he said he was a free trader. He also said in telling us of Donaldson's occupation that he had something to do with Smithsonian Institute; "making a book on the land question; no, not the l.q. — that would be like the weather." He has some humor, not much.

By 1886 Walt had ceased to travel much farther than to Philadelphia by the ferries, which were still his passion, but he managed to repeat his annual lecture on Abraham Lincoln, a pet plan of his for celebrating the drama of that great martyrdom each year on its anniversary. He now gave it in a theatre of Philadelphia; and it was repeated in New York in 1887. There was no longer much hesitation in recognizing Whitman's greatness, either privately or publicly, and the three lectures, one in Boston having been given earlier, brought out the most distinguished audiences. These events helped, as well, to contribute to his support. He was by no means provided with an adequate income and sometimes the purse grew very slender. Friends had given him a horse and two-seated wagon which afforded him great pleasure and needed change in the open air, and others later formed a fund of monthly payments which kept the household going. But the economic side of his life was a problem, and all was needed that came from lectures and from such pieces as were accepted by periodicals and newspapers.

I was once taken for a ride in this carriage, Warren Fritzinger, the man-nurse, who had been a sailor, driving, with Horace Traubel on the front seat and Walt and I on the back seat. When we were all aboard, Walt said: "Where shall we go?" I had no preference. He then said to me, "You have not been to the tomb." I said no; and he called out, "Same place, Warry," as though the tomb were his common resort. We drove through Camden, out to the green fields and finally to Harleigh Cemetery, in which Walt had been building the massive granite mausoleum where he and his parents were to be interred. It was a surprise to me as I had not heard of it. We drew up in a deep dell where the tomb was built into a hillside, and Walt told me to get out and look inside. The door was open. It was like a structure of the Druids. My note says: "A vast rugged Cyclopean granite mausoleum," and he said he had himself planned it. It united Blake and Ossian in its design. I looked at the triangular pediment and I was startled to see carved in raised letters the words:

WALT WHITMAN
MAY 31ST, 1890

It had the appearance of being already occupied. It was explained that the cemetery people had with characteristic and grim taste somehow got

the idea that the tomb was presented to Walt by his friends at the last birthday party and they had introduced the date of his birthday in the place where should have stood the date of his decease. This was, of course, corrected afterwards.

I stood talking to Walt by the wheel of the carriage and he asked me if I had ever read "Consuelo" by George Sand. The question was prompted by some remark about the tomb, which I have forgotten. He had a great liking for this novel and kept a copy always by him. We drove home by streets full of noisy children, and as they saw his flowing white hair and beard, they shouted "Kriss Kingle!" in joyous friendliness.

XVI

IT WAS in the first years of Walt's settlement in Camden that a group of young men had formed a Walt Whitman Club, and out of this grew an attachment which was inestimably serviceable to Walt while he lived and to his reputation since his death. Horace L. Traubel was one of this group, and he became the closest of Walt's friends. He and his brother-in-law, Thomas B. Harned, cherished and protected Walt till the end of his life. Without them his comfort, his happiness, and his very existence would have been threatened. They brought him help when he was financially in need; they gave him little luxuries which his sickness required; they watched over him when he was helpless, they kept away those who might have done harm, and Horace preserved much of Walt's writing that would have been lost in the great confusion of the little house, now streaming with all sorts of visitors all day long and often at night.

Horace Traubel was partly Jewish, partly Quaker — an unusual racial compound, which produced a faithfulness and altruism mingled with mystical and radical views of life that fell in well with Walt's own opinions and made their comradeship an ideal one. The records of this latter period

of Walt's life need never be attempted by any formal biographer. They lie in photographic reality in Traubel's three volumes, to which others will doubtless be added, entitled, "With Walt Whitman in Camden." Horace has caught the very accent of Walt's voice in these intimate records of the daily intercourse between them. He has told me that he grew so skilled in Walt's vocabulary, oddness of phrase, and course of thought that he could finish a sentence once begun, as Walt would do it himself. I quite credit this as exactly true. I can detect the phrase and the modulation of Walt's slow, hesitating and sonorous speech on every page of Traubel's valuable records. Each night he would go straight from his visit to Walt to his nearby home and set down their conversation in his imperishable files.

I have a note of one early autumn night in 1889 when Traubel and I, after supper at his house, went round the corner to Mickle Street to see Walt. My memorandum runs:

Walt was in the front room by the window, without a lamp. As we went in Traubel asked Mrs. Davis if Walt was there, to which she replied yes, and then Walt held out his hand to each of us with a pleasant welcome. Traubel proposed to sit in the dark, but Walt said when he had company he liked a light, and so one was lit in the entry. I then went over from behind the table, opposite Walt, to a chair by his side. I could see little save his dark figure, wrapped well up in a long robe and

a shawl and the outlines of his white hair, occasionally too a glance of his eye. We talked first of the storm raging without and of the inundated meadows at Atlantic City on the sea-coast. Then I asked him if he liked my translation of the Gabriel Sarrazin essay and he replied, very much. I spoke of Sarrazin's tolerance and broad views for a Frenchman, and he said there was a school of thinkers in Paris who could look beyond France and find good. Even Victor Hugo could not do so. I told him the plot of "Madame Bovary" and how the hiatuses in the realism were the source of the nastiness — the lack of realism being the book's worst feature. He told an anecdote of a witty Frenchman who said if you put a bonnet on a nude statue it at once became obscene. He quoted Millet: "Everything may be expressed if it is only on high enough grounds." He spoke enthusiastically of the letters from England sent by Julian Hawthorne and some traveling American workmen, said they served to show us that we still have something to learn notwithstanding that our machinery is nearly perfection — we lack the finishing touch. I said it came from tradition and long familiarity with the work from generation to generation. He instanced the sailor families and their aptitudes that become hereditary. He spoke kindly of the "cuteness" of Doctors. He wanted to know the tone of Sarrazin's essays on other poets: "Has he understood them as he understood us?" He told an anecdote of a man cured by the supposed medicinal application of a little thermometer in his mouth, really inserted to take his temperature. Suddenly, he got up with some little exertion and commanding us to remain still, went through the door and upstairs. He looked like some ancient Druid in his long blue tunic and untanned leather slippers. He hobbled back again before long, but did not give any explanation of his absence. Traubel said he went after something for me but could not find it. It was a stoical proceeding

throughout. I got home about 10 p.m. Traubel sat in the semi-darkness, taking notes of the talk. He filled a little blank book. Walt inquired once what kept him so quiet, but he did not suspect the note-taking. I led Walt to talk of Concord, Mass., and he said he had laid a stone on Thoreau's cairn by Walden Pond, and that the original cairn was probably intact today as it got to be thought "bad form" to carry stones there. He was much interested in Emerson's quartz gravestone.

The essay on Walt by the noted French critic, Sarrazin, had come to Camden in a volume of such papers entitled "*La Renaissance de la Poésie Anglaise*," and it was brought to me by Traubel with the wish that I should translate it. This I did, and I recollect that we had hard work to restrain Walt from printing the over-effusive and eulogistic translation at the end of "Good-bye, My Fancy," which was then coming out. When Walt's papers were finally distributed, the manuscript of the translation came back to me, prepared for the press by the "Gray Poet," as he had there designated himself, with many other changes that quite disregarded the original French text, a few of which, and characteristic, follow.

For instance, where I had written "at times he will fall into almost an Hebraic chant," Walt changed it in blue pencil to "utter quite a" etc. Where the text calls for "this masculine life," Walt inserts "Poet's." He underlines in blue pencil the assertion, "The poetry of Walt Whit-

man proclaims at the outset *complete Pantheism*," thus accepting that ascription in full. In the sentence, "Has ever a spirit more profoundly lost itself in God than Whitman has," he inserts "ever"; and "Walt," as he does often elsewhere. In the ascribed principle that "God is in all things and everywhere, how can we help loving Him, etc.," he substitutes "being" for "is," and "I" for "we." In the line "numerous are the traces of meditative sorrows, of his bitterness as thinker and patriot," he adds "observer." He substitutes "peremptorily" for "suddenly," in the account of his dismissal by the Secretary of State. In the sentence, "He laughs at proportion and composition," he introduces "by 'cultured' critics." Under the words of President Lincoln, "Well, he looks like a man," Walt has double-lines of emphasis, thus indicating that he believed Lincoln did utter them. In Sarrazin's list of those Walt has rendered homage to, he introduces Cooper though not in the original. In the description of Walt's grandfather's house, he introduces, "It is still standing;" and he adds "sitting on the floor" to the group of slaves in that house. After "at sixteen years, Walt set out to learn typography," he adds "(he was so called to distinguish him from his father, Walter)," thus clinching that supposition. And at the end he substitutes for the pronoun "he" "the Gray poet."

Are these evidences that Walt was vain? Yes, he had the vanity of a little child who has not been curbed by conventions and goes frankly after what it wants. He wished his message to be received; he knew it was a valuable, a precious message — why not, then, use every decent means to circulate it? He believed in the wholesomeness of the truth. Why not tell it according to his light? And this philosophy of his was the source of his insistence on those passages of his book which offended a society built on polite deception, both of self and the rest.

Harned was Walt's host every Sunday at his spacious house near by, and the place would be overflowing with friends, young and old, on these gala days. Walt was in his element among those who loved and understood him. He greeted all comers in his large, benign way, and sipped the champagne, which was always provided for him, with gusto. I have seen him there seated in the hall at the top of the stairs, wide-brimmed gray hat tipped back and fun beaming from his face; or listening proudly to Weda Cook, now Mrs. Addicks, sing "Captain, My Captain" to her own beautiful music.

Apropos of what follows, I have noted on the back of an advance copy of "Good-Bye My Fancy" (a title perhaps suggested by "Halloo My Fancy," the little book of verse by our friends

Charles H. Lüders and Decatur Smith, Jr., that came out about the same time) that Walt gave me the copy on June 5, 1891, with this little speech:

“I feel to say a word of grateful memory for those great fellows just passed away, for Bryant and Emerson and Longfellow, and for those we still have with us, Whittier, and the Boss of us all, Tennyson.”

Harned was also Walt's almoner at Mickle Street, where he kept some good whiskey always on hand for Walt's temperate consumption. In his younger years Walt rarely drank any spirits, but as he grew infirm it became necessary as a medicinal stimulant. I went one night with Traubel to see Walt in the upstairs room just before his bedtime. It was quite dark when we entered and I talked to him alone (Traubel was in a black corner taking notes behind the stove), about Tennyson, which subject was introduced by an *Athenaeum* containing a review of his new book, “Demeter,” which Gilchrist had asked me to take to Walt — and on Whittier and his poem, “Burning Driftwood,” which Walt thought one-third good. He said Whittier estimated a poem's worth according to its length. If he had read the proof he'd have omitted two-thirds of the poem. We also drifted into talk on the Quakers in Philadelphia and Long Island, and after this as we started to go, he got up and closed the shutters carefully, then lit an Ar-

gand burner which had no shade and a chimney broken off just above the light. He asked us to have a doughnut, and showed me a rose from a bottle of water on his table, then concocted a "toddy" in an old shaving mug, saying he was an adept at the business. This was so powerful with whiskey that it quite appalled me. It was enough for two, and I supposed he would share it with me (Traubel was an abstainer). I took it down, however, he saying it wasn't strong, and, when I objected to its effects, he said, "Probably you'll have a little whiskey in it." There were prolonged consequences at the party which we afterward attended, and where I was billed to read a paper.

This upstairs front room was a perfectly chaotic place, where Walt's helplessness and his natural disregard of conventional order joined to make a hopeless confusion. In the winter season, as he grew worse in health, he was practically confined to this room, and the hot stove that warmed it lay to his left as you entered the door, but near enough to the mass of old papers and queer belongings that he cherished, to set them afire in case a spark or a coal fell amongst them. There was, I believe, one slight fire, but I always expected a big blaze. The old newspapers, books, manuscripts, shoes, walking stick, with the crook of which he managed the stove, and other accumulations, lay around his chair in a high-piled semi-circle over

which you had to step to greet him. I once took to see him Arthur Stedman, son of his old friend the poet of the Pfaff cellar days who had not always of late been accounted friendly. I stepped within the circle and shouted the introduction into Walt's deaf ears, and then stepped back to repeat a greeting to Arthur, who was himself very deaf. I kept up this form of communication between them, stepping over the debris each time back and forth, until Walt began to say something not too complimentary of Arthur's father, when I ceased to act and the interview closed.

Walt was not without wit; he would sometimes pass a pun; but his humor came in rare flashes, as with the whiskey-toddy, and I do not believe that he saw the drollness of a situation like this with Arthur Stedman; nor would his sense of the ridiculous perceive the queer little things which often arose among the too ardent disciples about him. He would have taken seriously the essay read to us by Dr. Bucke in a restaurant in Chestnut Street, on "Cosmis Consciousness," in which Walt was endowed with super-human senses; and ending with a list of the prophets and wise men of the earth, beginning with Jesus, coming down to Mohammed, and passing through Walt Whitman to Dr. Bucke himself, who had possessed this rare endowment, as pictured for us. Dr. Bucke related his own envelopment with this super-sense as having taken place in

a flash of light as he went to the hydrant in his back yard to draw water of an evening.

Naturally, Walt gathered around him the mystics and enthusiasts who were devoid of his own good sense, and some very funny things thus happened. He was inclusive enough to like those who had no sense of humor, as well as those who would laugh at or make a joke, but there was the Quaker trait in his fibre which wants to analyze even a joke, and thus he sometimes fell into the mood of his followers.

In 1889 Walt was seventy, and the custom began of tendering him a dinner on his birthday, May 31st. The first of these was held at Morgan Hall, in Camden, a Masonic assembly room, large and gloomy, in which Walt with the speakers sat at the head of the long table and the hundred or more guests down its narrow length to the door. There were speeches by Harned and Francis Howard Williams and Herbert Gilchrist and by Walt, who read a few words, saying in part, "Following the impulse of the spirit (for I am at least half of Quaker stock) I have obeyed the command to come and look at you for a minute." Then Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the *Century Magazine*, said that Walt's war poetry was "in form unapproachable," though he softened this phrase in the subsequent record; and Julian Hawthorne, son of the great American romancer, followed with

a passionate little speech — the success of the occasion, quoting “not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,” which won long applause. Some of us almost feared that Walt’s glory was threatened by Hawthorne’s reception, and Walt too may have felt thus, for he slyly remarked, when the noise had ceased, “That’s for your father, Julian.” Whereupon ensued prolonged laughter. The established fame of Whitman was made evident by telegrams read from the elect of literature and learned professions, including Whittier, the Quaker poet, who had burned the first copy of “Leaves of Grass” sent him by its obscure author.

The following birthday, 1890, when Walt had reached seventy-one, was celebrated by a dinner at Reisser’s restaurant in Philadelphia. This was a German beer saloon with a large room upstairs where a long table was set for about thirty. I had the honor to be placed at Walt’s left, and thus I saw and heard him closely. Opposite sat Robert G. Ingersoll, called familiarly “Bob,” who had recently joined the growing band of Walt’s friends. When the dinner was over, Colonel Ingersoll was called on to speak, and he delivered a flowing, eloquent eulogy of Walt, ending each period by leaning across the narrow table and declaring with an emphatic reach of the hand, “I thank *you*, Walt Whitman,” for one great thing after another to the end. He had quoted Shakespeare match-

lessly, and he evidently knew "Leaves of Grass" with fidelity, but there was something lacking; he omitted the divine spirit, he believed in no ultimate destiny for man's soul. This made a deep impression on Walt, who, when the Colonel sat down, began a slow-spoken colloquy. What did it all mean, the universe about us, asked Walt, if there was no immortal soul? Ingersoll could give no answer, and I recollect Walt's hesitating words shaping themselves into the sentence: "You might as well try to run a train of cars without a locomotive."

This memorable speech of Ingersoll's, by some one's suggestion, became a written lecture which Ingersoll gave for Walt's benefit at Horticultural Hall in Philadelphia. It was managed by Horace Traubel and myself. Ingersoll was to come over from New York and meet us at a hotel. On the day chosen we received a telegram from one of Walt's New York friends saying: "If I pay Colonel's fare, will you reimburse me?" The fare was about four dollars. We thought this odd, and decided not to reply. When the Colonel arrived in the hotel accompanied by the sender of the telegram, we went through the greetings and showed Ingersoll his room. His companion then whispered to Traubel that he need not return him Ingersoll's fare as, in fact, Ingersoll had paid the fare of both.

Walt was late in arriving at the lecture. He was

very feeble, and the trip from Camden was a heavy drain on his strength. There was a great audience of perhaps fifteen hundred people, all sorts of men and women, as Walt liked it. The stage was set with a circle of chairs which remained empty so long that the audience grew restless and began to clap for the appearance of the speaker. In the midst of this, a gray-clad figure, leaning on a cane, with wide-brimmed gray hat and long gray hair, stood in the centre entrance of the stage and gazed around the auditorium. It was the image of Walt Whitman, and the people went wild in their applause and cries of welcome. The figure bowed in acceptance of the ovation; there was greater noise than ever. When the tumult died down it became known that the figure was Dr. Bucke.

Not long afterward Walt himself painfully limped on the stage and received his own greeting, with the benign countenance and great dignity that always characterized him.

After the lecture the particular friends of Walt gathered at a table in a café near-by, and it was found that about one thousand dollars had been obtained for the feeble old poet's comfort, for which he expressed gentle and modest thanks to Colonel Ingersoll, and I can see him now cautiously folding up the money and putting it safely away in the inside pocket of his great gray coat.

And this also recalls that day when I saw him

seated in his big rough rocking-chair by the window on the street, in Camden, opening letters that asked for autographs. Some of them he complied with, but all he could not begin to answer; and he was engaged when I then saw him, hat on and gray coat with many pins stuck in the sleeve for safe-keeping, in peeling off the postage stamps that were sent him for reply, and placing them frugally on an improvised shelf attached to the window ledge. The chair was the gift of Thomas Donaldson, a collector of all that was odd but often not valuable. He was one of the group that made Walt's last years comfortable. So was Dr. D. G. Brinton, an ethnologist of note, and a student of letters. It was at his house that the sender of the telegram about Ingersoll's railway fare delivered an address on his association with Walt, wherein he told feelingly of Walt's affection for his wife. He described her death, and how Walt placed a lily in her hand as she lay on her bed of death, and he worked us up to an extreme pitch of emotion. Then, with a change of voice and manner, denoting that that episode was over and done with, he cried out, "About a year from that day, when I had married my present wife," which shocked his audience into unseemly laughter and left a humorous impression of a solemn occasion.

The third birthday dinner of 1891 was held in the lower room of the little box-like house on

Mickle Street, Camden. The two rooms together were hardly larger than a good-sized parlor, and now the folding doors were thrown back and a narrow table ran from the front wall to the rear. Walt sat in the centre, facing the hall, and the faithful friends grouped themselves on either hand. There was not much light nor much to eat, but it was a memorable meal because Walt was seventy-two and his massive body was showing the ravages of disease and age. He had to be helped to his chair with strong arms, and he sat down in some exhaustion. But everybody was familiar to him and loved him much, and as his eye ranged along the table he lost the dazed look with which he entered, and when the speeches began he was full of his old-time fun. He lifted his glass of champagne in a toast to Bryant, Emerson and Longfellow, dead; and to Tennyson and Whittier, living poets; and he talked of old friends. Dr. Bucke asked questions which Walt parried, and Lincoln Eyre, a young lawyer, made a flowery sort of speech, incidentally asking Walt why he had never married. To this Walt gave a rambling reply with evasive reference to the cat in the Nibelungen, "or somebody else's, with an immensely long, long tail to it." He could not stay till the end; but grew tired and was helped back to his room upstairs, waving a blessing for us all as he disappeared in the little entry.

This was near the limit of his strength. He lived with ebbing and flowing endurance for nearly a year, but he suffered as any great nature must suffer who knows the loveliness of nature and the devotion of friends and realizes deeply the separation approaching and the unknown regions beyond. He was not afraid, he was brave under physical woe, and he had welcomed death in his chanting as few or none among the singers of the world had greeted it:

Come, lovely and soothing Death

was his burden in lustier days as in these hours of darkness and affliction.

The flickering spirit was almost extinguished more than once. I remember how Dr. Bucke came down from Canada, and sketched out to Williams all the details of a funeral that did not happen for several months. Walt sent a last message to his friends in February 1891, in which prophetically he said:

More and more it comes to the fore, that the only theory worthy our modern times, for great literature, politics and sociology, must combine all the best people of all lands, the women not forgetting.

On March 26th, 1892, Walt Whitman died.

The funeral was as characteristic as his life and his death. The crowd that entered the little old shabby house was enormous. They streamed in

for three hours; then the carriages came, and the pallbearers who were to ride got in four by four and waited for the start. I was in a carriage with Judge Garrison, of the New Jersey courts, and Jim Scoval, as he was briefly called, a journalist who had written much of Walt, and who once drolly confounded Sir Edwin with Matthew Arnold in reporting a visit of the former to Mickle Street. Another Camden journalist and friend, Harry Bon-sall, occupied the fourth seat.

A huge tent had been erected at Harleigh Cemetery, not far from Walt's tomb. It was a sunny, mild day, but under the tent it became hot and the speakers perspired. There were remarks by Dr. Brinton, Ingersoll, Harned and others, and between each Francis Howard Williams read the words of some seer or prophet of old. There was no lamentation, no sense of loss, no woe; we all felt that Walt had been translated into the elements; and, mingled spiritually with them, would be an influence in the eternal advance of Nature and of nations.

It is typical of Walt, whose opposing American traits made up the seer and poet in him commingled with the canny and frugal Quaker, that he should have left by will to his family six thousand dollars, that this prophet who was fed by the ravens should have laid by a hoard for the accidents of a life that Nature alone should guard and

provide against. Such were the marks of a mind of deep vision tempered by cautious common sense.

In his will he appointed Horace L. Traubel, Thomas B. Harned and Dr. Bucke his literary executors, and they have well fulfilled his designs.

XVII

I HAVE spoken principally of the man, Walt Whitman. But when the dross of the body melts away and the man disappears — there stands the Book, a visible evidence of his soul. It can not be described; it must be read. It is the recorded wisdom and emotion of a great spirit. Who could adequately convey its substance or its elusive meaning in other words than its own?

I can only describe its form and its aim and express briefly, as I have already done in part, its effect on another soul that responds to its message. It was a rebel's utterance against laws of custom that cramped and thwarted. Therefore, it was spoken in speech and rhythm not before so used. The rhythm was that of sing-song prose like nothing else in literature except Ossian. There was no rhyme, and lines were as irregular as the author chose to make them. Yet he built up his structure with care and design and he had a standard of technical perfection, as is shown by the many alterations in the text of successive editions, which are always for the better, always give more elasticity and harmony.

The words were often unusual and sometimes invented by him, but his meaning was clear and

the effect he sought was evidently that of the vernacular without affectation or polish. He declared that it cost him a good deal of time to clear out the conventional catch-words from his first edition. He consciously wished to express a new scheme of thought in new and unusual diction.

He once said to Dr. Bucke: "The psychology of the book is a deeper problem. It is perhaps only to be studied out in the poems themselves, and it is a hard study there."

Thus his purpose even to himself seemed obscure, as it must to every great poet, who as a poet is not exploring science but is embarked on the mystery of the universe and knows not his ultimate port.

But certain great salient facts the Book stands for and these are the refusal to repeat the old formulas, called truth and faith, in the old blind way; rejection of the hypocritical shame of the body and its functions, coupled with a clear declaration that bearing children and all its concomitants are a divine function; insistence that mankind is no separate and superior part of Nature but an atom in its fabric; and, deepest and most evident of all, that thus men and women are a brotherhood and that consequently democracy is the only righteous form of government because it is government by tolerance and comradeship and love.

There are deeps within deeps through the pages of "Leaves of Grass." Its truth and penetration are touchstones that undo more than they mean to; but with love of one's kind — divine sympathy — as a fundamental law of life, all the other theories follow inevitably. Walt had found a bedrock of law, and standing on it all else was made manifest.

A poet — even a seer — must have something to utter besides his theory of life and death. He would otherwise bring us only a thesis, not an art, not a living creation. Thus Walt must in the end live by the way he has said things, as well as by the things he said. And estimated by this test he stands on the great hill of song near the summit.

I have described the sensations aroused by the first reading of the earlier poems, the lifting of the soul from custom to freedom, and have given examples of the exquisite poetry accompanying this exultant outburst of personality. So throughout the fabric of the work there are dry passages, often hardly explainable, succeeded by bursts of music, emotion, tenderness, beauty of epithet and profound vision. This is not unusual in a poet who is also a thinker. Wordsworth has many bare passages. But these are forgotten in the inspiration of his nobler odes and sonnets, just as Whitman's "Auctioneer's Catalogue," as Emerson calls it, is swept into oblivion by the sonorous passion of his great soul.

The pieces that stand out from the general text in this way are the early "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," meaning the sea and its memories for him in his infancy and boyhood; and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," his burial hymn of President Lincoln. Both of these long odes are inspired by the sea, the mocking-bird, the moon and the lilacs of his Long Island home. There are lyrics like "The City Dead House," "To a Common Prostitute," "To the Man-of-War Bird," "The Dalliance of the Eagles," "Fancies at Navesink," that stand undiminished beside the best in English letters. And there are passages of poetry, pure and touching, in "Drum-Taps" that surpass any on our Civil War. As types I suggest "Come up from the Fields, Father," and "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night." There is here the application of the heavenly tolerance and sympathy which kinship with Nature and Man would beget in us all were we to apply Walt's saving truths.

But, apart from the poetry, large, deep-toned, pure and free, is the other element of "Leaves of Grass" that attracted its first readers in spite of its fancied offenses against a false sense of taste, and made them burst with exhilaration as oxygen might do, or the buoyancy of a fine frosty day after cloud and storm. This is the accent of energetic, tip-toe personality, expressing its sensations, and

wisdom drawn from such sensations, in shouts of exultation at the beauty of the universe; at being alive to enjoy it; at throwing off the chains of habit; at being the comrade of everybody; and at being an optimist, and especially a democrat. This was a surprise so great to readers that only those already free enough from convention, like Emerson and Thoreau, could catch their breath and take it in. But where it was understood, it was a new dawn, an intoxication of liberty, that has gone on improving in its application to life as the years pass.

INDEX

INDEX

- Alcott, A. Bronson, 44
 Aldrich, Thomas Bailey, 46
 American Institute of New York,
 73
 Ashton, Hubley, 59, 65
 Barrett, Wilson, 83
 Beecher, Henry Ward, 44
 Blake, William, 93
 Booth, John Wilkes, 62
 Brinton, Dr. D. G., 108, 111
 Bryant, William Cullen, 101, 109
 Buchanan, President James, 53
 Buchanan, Robert, 74
 Bucke, Dr. Maurice, 44, 75, 76,
 85, 86, 103, 107, 109, 110, 112,
 114
 Burroughs, John, 8, 10, 58, 72,
 74, 76, 81, 88
 "Carpenter, The," 58
 Childs, George W., 79
 Clare, Ada, 46
 Clarke, Edward C., 21
 Cleveland, President Grover, 83
 Clifford, Rev., 89
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 13
 Conway, Eustace, 68
 Conway, Moncure, 44
 Cook, Weda (Mrs. Addicks), 100
 Cooper, Colin C., 90
 Cooper, J. Fenimore, 43, 99
 Dana, Charles A., 48
 Dartmouth College, 73
 Davis, Mrs., 78, 80, 82, 90, 96
 Donaldson, Thomas, 91, 92, 108
 Doyle, Peter, 72, 74
 Eldridge, Charles, 72
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 43, 47
 48, 49, 51, 53, 59, 69, 76, 77,
 83, 98, 101, 109, 115, 117
 Eyre, Lincoln L., 109
 Fowler and Wells, 48
 Fritzinger, Warren, 93
 Garrison, Judge, 111
 Garrison, William Lloyd, 53
 Gilchrist, Mr. and Mrs. Alex-
 ander, 67, 68, 76, 87, 90
 Gilchrist, Herbert Harlakenden,
 68, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88,
 90, 104
 Gilder, Richard Watson, 104
 "Good-Bye, My Fancy," 100
 Good Gray Poet, The, 58
 Grant, Gen. Ulysses S., 56
 "Halloo, My Fancy," 100
 Harlan, James, 65
 Harleigh Cemetery, 93, 111
 Harned, Thomas B., 89, 95, 100,
 101, 104, 111, 112
 Hawthorne, Julian, 97, 104, 105
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 43, 82
 Hicks, Elias, 16, 17, 18
 Hicksites, 18
 Howells, William D., 47
 Hugo, Victor, 97
 Hunt, Leigh, 13
 Ingersoll, Robert G., 105, 106,
 107, 111
 Jackson, Andrew, 26
 Johnson, President Andrew, 70
 Johnston, J. H., 76
 Keats, John, 13, 83

- Lafayette, Marquis of, 20
 Lamb, Charles, 86
 "La Renaissance de la Poésie Anglaise," 98
 Lincoln, Abraham, 9, 53, 54, 56, 57, 62, 63, 64, 92, 99
 Longfellow, Henry W., 101, 109
 Long Island Patriot, 21
 Long Island Star, 21
 Lowell, James Russell, 85
 Lüders, Charles H., 101

 "Madame Bovary," 97
 McKay, David, 77
 Miller, Joachin, 91
 Millet, Jean Françoise, 97
 Milnes, Monckton, Lord Houghton, 44
 Morse, 82
 Murger, Henry, 83
 O'Connor, William D., 58, 65, 76

 Penn, William, 15
 Perry, Bliss, 87
 Pfaff's Cellar, 46, 58, 103
 Phillips, Wendell, 53

 Rodd, Sir Rennell, 67
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel and William Michael, 67, 69, 74
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 88

 Sanborn, Frank B., 77
 Sand, George, 94
 Sarrazin, Gabriel, 97, 98
 Scott, Sir Walter, 21
 Scott, W. Bell, 67
 Scoval, Jim, 111
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 74
 Smith, Decatur, Jr., 101
 Smith, Joseph, 15
 Smith, R. Pearsall, 79, 81

 Society for the Suppression of Vice, Boston, 77
 "Specimen Days," 55
 Stafford, Edwin, 87
 Stafford, George, 75, 86, 87
 Stedman, Arthur, 103
 Stedman, Edmund Clarence, 46, 58
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 67
 Symonds, John Addington, 29, 67

 Taylor, Bayard, 75
 Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, 13, 67, 73, 83, 85, 101, 109
 Thayer and Eldridge, 48, 58
 Thoreau, Henry D., 43, 98, 117
 Traubel, Horace, 89, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 106, 112
 Tufts College, 73

 Van Velsor, Major Cornelius, 10
 Van Velsor, Louisa, 11

 "Walt Whitman's Drum Taps," 61
 Ward, Artemus, 46
 Wharton, Joseph, 87
 Whitman, George, 54, 55, 61, 71, 72, 74, 77
 Whitman, Hannah, 13
 Whitman, Walter, 10
 Whitman, Rev. Zechariah, 9
 Whittier, John Greenleaf, 101, 105, 109
 Williams, Amy, 10, 11
 Williams, F. Churchill, 79
 Williams, Francis Howard, 79, 80, 90, 104, 111
 Wilson, President Woodrow, 66
 Winter, William, 46
 "With Walt Whitman in Camden," 96
 Wordsworth, William, 13, 115

